



The Laffite Society Chronicles

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Editor's Page

Don C. Marler

This has been a good year for the Laffite Society. Interest remains high and new President, Jim Nonus, is approaching his task with a high level of energy and enthusiasm. He has already planned and executed a field trip to New Orleans, the birthplace of the Laffite escapades. The visit was a great success as have been all our trips to that historic city. There is talk of expanding our field trips to more distant lands; be on the lookout for more on these tentative plans.

The New Orleans trip was, on the business side, highlighted by a presentation at the Napoleon House Café by Betje Black Klier, PhD on Latour, Lallemand and Laffite. For those interested in Laffite and Champ d' Asile. Dr. Klier has a wealth of information. See the report of the new Orleans trip by Jim Nonus.

There is likely still much unearched material on the Laffites and their activities and especially on their associates. We are ready to publish your findings in *The Laffite Chronicles*. We are at an all time

low on publishable materials.

We have accumulated perhaps the largest body of materials extant today in the English language on the activities of our favorite privateer-pirates. And it is critical that we give serious attention to a permanent archive for them. The location of the archive should be in a public place easily accessible to members of the public and scholars. Should we make provisions for a web-based archive as well as an archive for hard copies? Should we not have a committee to study these and related issues and make a report with recommendations to the Board?

In many ways our efforts to study and accumulate information of the Laffites has been remarkably successful. It has not only resulted in an accumulation of materials, an analysis on those materials and publication of twenty four issues of *The Laffite Chronicles*, but also has feed source material to several new Laffite related books and articles.

FANTASY ARCHAEOLOGY: THE SEARCH FOR LAFFITE'S TREASURE

Robert C. Vogel

Be forewarned: this is an excursion onto the wild side of history. Stories of treasure troves buried in Louisiana, Texas, and elsewhere by Laffite the Baratarian pirate have been a staple of regional folklore since the nineteenth century. All along the Gulf Coast, but especially the sector between Pensacola and Corpus Christi, indigenous stories of Laffite's lost treasure have been handed down for generations (some have been kicking around for more than 150 years); transmitted orally and in print, endlessly renewed and varied by individual repetition; forgotten, and then reinvented to satisfy the tastes of new audiences. Because of their readers' familiarity with the myth of the "Pirate of the Gulf," as well as the abiding public fascination with getting rich quickly through the chance discovery of a mysterious lost treasure, these stories have been especially appreciated and widely circulated.¹

Many of the most enduring Laffite treasure legends incorporate traditional elements of "lost treasure" folklore, which is itself an ancient phenomenon that is world-wide in scope.² The important thematic elements in this folkloric tradition may be briefly summarized as follows. First, there is a fabulously rich treasure of some kind, deposited by Laffite while on the run from the authorities. It is lost and in a remote or mysterious location. It is sometimes guarded by ghosts or is cursed. Sometimes there is a map, a diary, or some other document which records the location of the treasure, but it is either too cryptic to be useful or has mysteriously disappeared. Some form of ill-luck always attends the searchers of the trove: in most variations, an intrepid male explorer stumbles upon the treasure but somehow loses the location. His story entices future hopefuls to search in vain for the

hidden wealth, sometimes with terminal consequences -- ergo, the treasure remains "lost."³

In 1931 Frank Dobie, the dean of Texas folklorists, published a collection of Southwestern lost treasure stories, to which he contributed what many regard as the classic Jean Laffite buried treasure story (one which was already very old when Dobie first heard it sometime near the end of the nineteenth century). It goes like this: Somewhere near the mouth of the Lavaca River is a buried treasure trove of gold, silver, and jewels that was hidden by Jean Laffite when he was fleeing for his life. Laffite's schooner, *The Pride*, heavily laden with plunder, had been overtaken by an American warship in the Gulf and chased inshore. Unable to elude his pursuer, Laffite ran the *Pride* into the mouth of the river, where the gunboat dared not follow. There he divided the treasure among his men and bade them flee. With two trusted companions, he then proceeded with his own personal chest a short distance inland, to a spot hidden from view by tall grass, where he had the men dig a hole, deposit the treasure chest in it, and cover it with earth. Using a compass and a Jacob's staff, Laffite took bearings on two nearby clumps of oak trees to fix the precise location of the treasure, then pounded the brass surveyor's staff into the ground over the chest, leaving a foot or so exposed. The pirates never made it back to reclaim their loot. Many years later, a black herder found the Jacob's staff, pulled it out of the ground, and used it to tether his horse. Back at the ranch, his boss recognized the staff when he saw it and ordered the herder to take him to the place where the staff had been found. This proved to be impossible and the buried chest of pirate treasure was never found.⁴

What may at first seem to be a primal Texas tale in fact contains recurring elements from other legends of pirate treasures buried in Louisiana. Perhaps the most persistent of these has its epicenter within the Lake Charles city limits. The core of the legend is that Laffite frequented the Calcasieu Parish area during the years he was based at Galveston (i.e., circa 1817 to 1820). At the time, the region was wilderness except for the tiny settlement on the southwestern shore of Lake Charles, named for frontiersman Charles Sallier dit Savoyard. Laffite had captured a Spanish treasure ship out on the Gulf but was chased into the mouth of the Calcasieu River by a United States man-o'-war. Sailing up the Calcasieu, Laffite's schooner slipped around into a little cutoff of Contraband Bayou to hide from his pursuer; once the immediate danger had passed, the pirates made their way down the Contraband into the lake and anchored in front of Sallier's cabin. After offloading the treasure and burying it, Laffite's men brought off the schooner's armament and placed their cannon behind an improvised breastwork on top of a large shell midden; then they scuttled the schooner in deep water and settled down to wait for the American warship, which never made it through the tortuous passage into Lake Charles. After several days, Laffite purchased a replacement schooner from Sallier, had his men dig up some (but not all) of their treasure, and sailed back out onto the Gulf. For years afterward, the shell beach "fort" was known as Money Hill in an allusion to the pirate booty hidden there.⁵ According to local tradition, this episode also marks the beginning of Sallier's collaboration with Laffite, a partnership which came to an abrupt end several years later when Charles came to suspect his wife Catherine LeBleu of having had an affair with the pirate chieftain. In a jealous rage, Sallier shot his wife with a pistol, but the ball glanced off Catherine's amethyst brooch (a gift from the pirate), thus saving her life. Charles ran off and was never seen again.

Why so many Laffite legends coalesce around this particular lost treasure

theme are so frequent and similar is not known. Perhaps there was some historical basis for the legend. However, it is more likely that these stories are a reflection of a traditional impulse to construct treasure legends along a limited number of favored pathways.

Complementary to the folkloric aspects of pirate treasure is the physical search for specific treasures (as well as shipwrecks and other lost objects) associated with Laffite. As the title of this paper suggests, more often than not the driving force behind this quest has been historical fantasy, not folklore, manifested in a set of unfortunate misconceptions, fanciful historical interpretations, and misguided theories about Laffite, the Baratarians, and the history of piracy in the Gulf of Mexico.

The search for Laffite's treasure began within a few years of his historical exit from the Gulf of Mexico and persists to the present day.⁶ From the beginning, the quest has been framed by the notion that pirates buried treasure. Although hidden treasure has been a favorite theme in pirate stories since ancient times, there are very few documented cases of pirates who actually buried their plunder. Even during the Golden Age of Piracy on the Spanish Main, when the rewards of buccaneering were greatest, most freebooters preferred spending their loot over caching it on the beach. Notwithstanding that there have been only a mere handful of finds of authentic pirate "treasure" anywhere in the western hemisphere, in fantasy archaeology, as we shall see, belief is always paramount over evidence.

Typically, the search for Laffite's treasure was undertaken by an individual or a small group of like-minded adventurers who were nearly always white men. Greed and adventure were the main motivations. The first critical task of every treasure hunter was to decide upon which treasure trove to seek. More often than not, this required some research to establish an historical basis for the undertaking and thereby legitimize it.

Once the treasure hunt was conceptualized, the immediate objective was to find some landmark (a high bank or island, the mouth of a river, etc.), where some scrap of pirate lore indicated the presence of Laffite or one of his numerous lieutenants; preferably, this spot was distant from any densely settled place, where there were no prying eyes, and where it was practicable to dig. If they intended to comply with the letter of the law, the treasure hunters either secured permission from the legal owner or purchased an interest in the tract -- most often, they simply trespassed.⁷ Arriving at the chosen locality, they commenced to prospecting by digging, oftentimes randomly, and nearly always with completely negative results. Invariably, the next task was to enlist the support of financial backers enticed by the prospect of sharing in the pirate loot which lay just beyond the reach of the original searchers. A crude speculation was thus provided and if things went well the treasure hunters found themselves in a position to further improve their situation by spending other people's money. Although treasure hunters invariably observed the greatest secrecy possible in their operations, word inevitably got out and if the project received favorable attention, other freelancers would soon appear, and in their wake usually came a newspaper editor or magazine feature writer.⁸

Treasure hunting has an obvious alliance with history as well as traceable roots in the Victorian antiquarianism that was the cradle of modern archaeology. Indeed, it would be safe to say that the search for Laffite's treasure has been pervaded by a general intellectual atmosphere of armchair speculation about his role in national and local history. Although most authors with any pretensions to scholarly merit have dismissed Lafitte's treasure as the stuff of legend and folklore, successive generations of history writers have legitimized the search for hidden pirate treasure through their dissemination of misinformation about Laffite and the Baratarians (albeit unknowingly, for the most part). All of the best known

"standard" works on the subject, for example, tend to inflate the numbers of ships and men employed by the Laffite brothers as well as the booty amassed by the colonies of adventurers at Baratania and Galveston.⁹ The *Journal of Jean Laffite*, a counterfeit Laffite memoir with fantastic claims (including secret treasures) that surfaced in the 1950's, added to the volume of spurious data and invalid interpretations; reference citations to the *Journal* continue to crop up in academic publications.¹⁰ And while the state of scholarly knowledge of Laffite has always been very broad but quite shallow, some of the purported findings that have poured forth from popular historians and biographers would make any good novelist blush. Popularizing Laffite, with the inevitable allusions to his buried treasures, lost forts, and sunken ships, remains a priority for local history compilers throughout the Gulf South.¹¹

It is obvious that the search for Laffite's treasure has also been interwoven with and unraveled from some of the core elements in Robert Louis Stevenson's masterpiece of piratania, *Treasure Island*, which first appeared in American bookstores in 1883.¹² Without any doubt, the most forceful impact on Laffite treasure seeking has come from two enormously popular books published roughly a century apart. Joseph Holt Ingraham created the cult of Laffite the pirate-hero when Harper & Brothers released his romantic novel *Lafitte: The Pirate of the Gulf* in 1836.¹³ The influence of Ingraham's blockbuster upon treasure hunting during the middle decades of the nineteenth century must have been exceedingly strong; one measure of its influence is the outpouring of vernacular history writing about Laffite that appeared in mainstream publications such as *DeBow's Review* between the 1840's and the 1870's, many of which cite it. Ingraham's success may have also prompted Boston bookseller Charles Ellms to publish his classic, *The Pirates Own Book*, the following year.¹⁴ The historical (as opposed to folkloric) contents of these works was highly variable but together they formed the baseline of the

Victorian era treasure hunter movement.¹⁵ By the beginning of the twentieth century, Jean Laffite was well established as a popular hero in both fictional and historical writing but there was no definitive, book-length Laffite biography until publication of Lyle Saxon's pseudo-historical but eminently readable *Lafitte the Pirate* in 1930.¹⁶ Inspired in no small part by the success of Saxon's book and Cecil B. DeMille's swashbuckling film *The Buccaneer* (which premiered in 1938), by the 1940's, public and scholarly interest in Laffite was running quite high within the Gulf South region and the country in general; yet, most of the Laffite writing remained speculative and romantic but generally uninformed by the critical analysis of primary sources - and, therefore, perfect grist for the treasure hunter's mill.¹⁷

Hunting for buried treasure was a popular Victorian era sport and nowhere is the phenomenon better documented than in southern Louisiana, where the folkloric map of the coastal marshlands is dotted with Laffite's lost treasures.¹⁸ Notwithstanding Laffite's historical association with New Orleans, the Mississippi River, Barataria Bay, Grand Isle, Lake Pontchartrain, and the Bayou Lafourche region, the attentions of the majority of nineteenth century treasure seekers were focused on more remote areas in the southwestern part of the state, with the lower Mermentau, Calcasieu, and Sabine rivers, English Bayou, White Lake, Big Lake, Grand Chenier, Caillou Island, Hackberry Island, Pecan Island, Kelso Island, and Jefferson Island emerging as recurrent treasure hunter hot-spots.¹⁹

Local historians have recorded major outbreaks of digging for Laffite's gold along Shell Beach Drive and Contraband Bayou ("so named because of Jean Laffite's known activities along its banks") in Lake Charles.²⁰ Shortly after the turn of the century, one Joseph Choate (alias Price Choate), an alligator hunter from Vermilion Parish, swindled about a dozen investors from Abbeville and Lafayette when he hatched a scheme to recover a cache of Laffite gold worth "ten million dollars" he

claimed to have discovered stashed in a brick vault near White Lake. Over \$10,000 was subscribed and a three-mile long canal was dug through the marsh -- but in the end, the investors lost their money and the promoters were sent to the state penitentiary.²¹ In the 1930s, WPA field workers recorded a billboard on the highway near Vinton that proclaimed "this is where 'Lafitte Buried His Treasure Beneath 40 Gum Trees.'" ²²

Farther down the coast in Texas, and especially around Galveston Bay, Laffite's treasure is also deeply embedded within the fabric of local history and folklore.²³ According to one local historian, the oral tradition of buried pirate gold was until quite recently particularly strong around the mouth of the Sabine River, where "almost every bayou and shell bank on Sabine Lake or the Neches River had its own 'patron,' or ghost, as the guardian of Lafitte's gold . . . generations of money hunters scoured the lake shores and marsh ridges, carrying 'maps' and strange detecting devices."²⁴ Stories of unsuccessful searches for treasures allegedly buried by Laffite and his associates take up about one-fourth of the only comprehensive overview of Galveston area treasures.²⁵ Since the 1840's, a veritable army of treasure hunters have dug in vain for Laffite's lost gold at the Three Trees, Maison Rouge, Clear Creek, and other sites around Galveston.²⁶ The bays and islands around Corpus Christi, supposedly a popular hideout for Laffite and his gang, have also attracted generations of treasure seekers.²⁷

Since antebellum times, Gulf Coast adventurers have known that chestfuls of doubloons were not the only objects of value which might have been left behind by Laffite and the Baratarians. The rush to obtain artifacts linked to Laffite the pirate began in the 1840's and Gilded Age antiquarians searched frantically for traces of various Laffite "forts" at Grand Terre, Galveston, and other points.²⁸ One of the results of this mania for Laffite-iana was the acquisition and display of hundreds of unprovenanced artifacts of questionable authenticity, many of

which eventually found their way into museum collections. Another was the accumulation of a body of pirate ship folklore, and it was not long before reports of shallow water shipwrecks purported to be "pirate" schooners sparked the curiosity of relic hunters and antiquarians. Popular interest in underwater fantasy archaeology received further stimulus whenever government-sponsored river and harbor improvement projects dredged up old ships' timbers, tackle, and the odd cannon. Interest in salvaging artifacts (and treasure) from various "Laffite ships" continued to grow in the twentieth century when several sensational underwater finds were reported.²⁹

The case of the "lost pirate ship" in Lake Miller, near Wallisville in Chambers County, Texas, offers a classic example of fantasy archaeology, where the hopes of the treasure seekers outran the evidence from the very start. Like every treasure hunt, it begins with a fantastic tale of pirate gold. According to local lore, when Laffite was ordered to leave Galveston in 1820 he loaded up his flagship the *Pride* with his goods, including five bearskins of gold doubloons, and sailed into the upper reaches of Galveston Bay, where the vessel ran aground and sank in the mouth of a small lake near the mouth of the Trinity River. The *Pride* was so heavily laden that she sank before the gold could be taken off; the treasure was never recovered, owing to Laffite's hasty departure from Texas and subsequent death in a sea-fight.³⁰

Sometime around 1850 this "lost treasure" legend manifested itself in the serendipitous discovery of an old wreck lying at the bottom of Lake Charlotte, near the mouth of the Trinity River on upper Galveston Bay. A local settler named Jake Sherman had cut down some oak timber growing on the natural levee at Lake Charlotte and was floating the saw logs down to the river when they snagged on a submerged obstacle which, upon inspection, turned out to be the deck and timbers of a wooden vessel. Eventually, the wreck disappeared beneath the mud and silt of a swampy wetland which came to be

known as Lake Miller, but the site was remembered by local folk and its location was allegedly marked by a large iron spike driven into the trunk of a tree. It is not recorded precisely when the connection was made between the wreck and Jean Laffite, but by the 1930's Jake Sherman's grandson, E. H. Sherman of rural Wallisville, was convinced it was the remains of the *Pride* with its bearskins full of doubloons.³¹

The first attempt to recover artifacts from the wreck was made in 1940. In 1935, Mr. Sherman had alerted area newspapers to the sunken pirate ship and proposed constructing a coffer dam around the wreck so that the site could be dredged and the treasure plucked from the mud. He was able to convince some area businessmen of the plan's practicality and they put up money for the recovery operation. However, as Lake Miller was submerged land and therefore state controlled, a permit was required from the General Land Office of Texas before any excavation work could commence. The treasure hunters applied for the exploration permit but were rebuffed by the Land Commissioner, who cited a lack of statutory authority for licensing treasure hunting.³²

The search for "Jean Lafitte's flagship" resumed after the war, when in August 1949, an outfit calling itself K & B Exploration Co. placed an advertisement in the *Houston Post* and other newspapers, wherein the owners stated they were in possession of a device capable of finding deeply buried items and offered to share the proceeds with anyone who could furnish a good treasure location.³³ Within a few weeks the second Miller Lake expedition was underway, using World War II surplus mine detectors and metal probes to confirm the presence of the wreck, which by that time was buried underneath about sixteen feet of sediment. With Sherman and another local man as partners, K & B successfully obtained a state land office exploration permit, said to be "the first of its kind ever issued," to build a casement around the wreck, pump out the mud and water, and recover the

pirate gold and other artifacts -- with the stipulation that the state school fund would receive 25% of the proceeds. Somewhat mysteriously, the permit was cancelled less than a month later when the Land Commissioner claimed the treasure hunters had not followed proper leasing procedures.³⁴ The expedition leaders were ordered to cease and desist and the project quietly folded.³⁵

Like the "lost treasure" folklore traditions, all of the canonical Laffite treasure and shipwreck hunting stories share at least two important characteristics in common, regardless of their origin in time or place. First, no credible explanation is offered as to why Laffite would have come to this particular place, let alone why he needed to scuttle an armed schooner far from any navigable waterway or deposit a chest of money along the shifting, muddy banks of a bayou or river estuary. Secondly, there is usually no "fake lore" in the form of elaborate forged documents or treasure maps: more often than not, the treasure hunters' motivations are based on their interpretations of certain historical "facts," most of which are predicated on the assumption that Laffite was a highly successful pirate who roamed the entire Gulf Coast, therefore, he must have left behind buried treasures or lost vessels in out of the way places which cry out for discovery.

The search for Laffite's treasure continues today, though perhaps not on quite the frenzied scale of the nineteenth and early twentieth century operations. Modern-day fantasy archaeology is mainly done by hobbyists equipped with metal detectors.³⁶ Just as significantly, new attitudes about the role of treasure hunting have developed. Adventure seems to have nudged past greed as the primary motive: it is widely reported on metal detecting websites that people with no interest in seeking large treasures often prospect for doubloons (a practice known as "coin shooting") strictly on a recreational basis.³⁷ Weekend escapees from the urban rat-race, these modern-day treasure prospectors are said to be seeking

health, not wealth. Nevertheless, there are still plenty of old school treasure hunters with incurable pirate gold fever, ready to invest hundreds of hours in metal detecting and digging in mud and sand under the hot sun.³⁸

¹ This article (a version of which was presented in the form of a paper at the 47th annual meeting of the Louisiana Historical Association in Lafayette, La., on March 18, 2005) deals with the folk archaeology of pirate treasure hunting, a form of archaeology that is based on vernacular history—indeed, there are some who would feel better if we were to substitute "folklore" for "history." Vernacular history and folk archaeology differ from their respective academic disciplines in that there are no fixed forms or rules: the practitioner is allowed absolute freedom in shifting back and forth between subjective and objective models of the past, the beauty of vernacular history being that, if you don't like someone's interpretation of a particular set of historical "facts," you can always rearrange them and introduce new material. Vernacular history is not synonymous with ignorance, nor is folk archaeology some kind of perverse science: both are folkways with near universal appeal that enable people to experience the past on their own terms.

² See Ralph D. Paine, *The Book of Buried Treasure* (New York, 1911).

³ This is sometimes referred to as the "El Dorado" theme. For an academic perspective with special reference to Laffite's treasure, see the articles by Frank Dobie, E. G. Littlejohn, Julia Beazley, J. O. Webb, and J. W. Morris in *Legends of Texas*, Publications of the Texas Folklore Society III, ed. J. Frank Dobie (Austin, 1924), 179-196.

⁴ J. Frank Dobie, *Coronado's Children: Tales of Lost Mines and Buried Treasures in the Southwest* (New York, 1931), 319-323. An interesting variant of this legend places the treasure at the mouth of the San Bernard River in Brazoria County: Laffite was driven ashore by a furious hurricane that killed all but one of the pirates. Also surviving the wreck was a female captive, none other than Theodosia Burr, the daughter of Aaron Burr, who was rescued by Indians but died shortly thereafter; J. W. Morris, "The Pirate Ship of

the San Bernard: A Legend of Theodosia Burr Allston," in *Legends of Texas*, 191-196. This story may have been inspired, at least in part, by the chance discovery of a box of Spanish era coins at Dead Man's Lake, near the mouth of the San Bernard, in 1912; this find prompted at least two private treasure hunting forays in 1930; see Federal Writers Project, *Houston: A History and Guide*, American Guide Series (Houston, 1942), 165.

⁵ Federal Writers Project, *Louisiana: A Guide to the State*, American Guide Series (New York, 1945), 286; and Stewart Alfred Ferguson, "The History of Lake Charles, Louisiana," M.A. thesis (Louisiana State University, 1931), 15. Part of the old shell beach, known locally as Barbe's Shell Bank, survives to the present day offshore from the historic Barbe House, 2709 Shell Beach Drive, the site of the old Sallier home until cabin was moved in 1841. Local observers insisted the pirate fort, first described in an 1866 article in the *Galveston Daily News*, could still be seen up until the 1930's.

⁶ One of the earliest, if not the earliest, of the Laffite treasure stories appeared in *Colburn's United Service Magazine* in 1846 (part 1, pages 236-242), entitled, "The Pirate of the Gulf; or, The Hidden Treasure." For historical perspective on Americans' money-digging mania, see Alan Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780-1830," *American Quarterly* 38 (1986):6-34. Taylor examined sixty-three treasure hunting episodes, of which forty dealt with pirates.

⁷ The disregard for landowner rights and the destruction of private property often caused sheriffs to run off treasure hunters, though only those guilty of the most egregious acts of vandalism were usually prosecuted. It was not until the 1970's that the states began enacting antiquities legislation to prohibit unlicensed "archaeology" on public land.

⁸ See "Treasure Trove," *Flake's Daily Bulletin* (Galveston), 5 November 1871; "Lafitte's Treasure," *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, 22 April 1909; and Walter B. Lister, "Buried Treasure of Jean Lafitte," *Frontier Times* (1924); Meigs O. Frost, "Bayou Folk Dig for Pirate Gold," *States* (New Orleans), 17 March 1938.

⁹ The worst offenders may have been Stanley Clisby Arthur, *Jean Lafitte, Gentleman Rover* (New Orleans, 1952); Jane Lucas DeGrummond, *The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, 1961); and Jack C. Ramsey, Jr., *Jean Lafitte: Prince of Pirates* (Austin, 1996); but several others could be listed as well.

¹⁰ A sampler of those taken in includes Georges Blond, *Histoire de la Flibustrie* (Paris, 1969); Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr., *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: The Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans 1812-1815* (Gainesville, 1981); and Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr., and Gene A. Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821* (Tuscaloosa, 1997).

¹¹ Recent examples include: Roberta Marie Christenson, *Pioneers of West Galveston Island* (Austin: Norten Press, 1966), 93-100 and passim; Miriam Partlow, *Liberty, Liberty County and the Atascosito District* (Austin, 1974), 51; Matagorda County Historical Commission, *Historic Matagorda County*, 2 vols. (Houston, 1986), II:391; Roberta Maria Christensen, *Pioneers of West Galveston Island* (Austin, 1992), 85, 93-100; Vermilion Historical Society, *History of Vermilion Parish, Louisiana* (Dallas, 1983), 172; Melanie Wiggins, *They Made Their Own Law: Stories of Bolivar Peninsula* (Houston, 1990), 101-102; and Henry E. Yoes, *A History of St. Charles Parish to 1973* (Norco, 1973), 35, 50.

¹² Stevenson (1850-1894) appears to have borrowed a good deal of his background material from Captain Thomas Johnson's enormously popular *General Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates* (first edition, London, 1724) but is generally credited with inventing much of modern Anglo American pirate mythology.

¹³ Ingraham (1809-1860) was born in New England but resided in the South, where he composed several best selling romances loosely based on historical themes. His *Lafitte* (the first edition was dedicated to Longfellow) was a publishing sensation, garnered generally good reviews (though Edgar Allen Poe tomahawked it in *The Southern Literary Messenger*) and went through several editions, including at least two twentieth century reprints. His son, Col.

Prentiss Ingraham (1843-1904), recycled some of his father's storylines in his popular dime-novels, first published during the 1880's and later reissued in paperback in the early 1930's.

¹⁴ *The Pirates Own Book; or, Authentic Narratives of the Lives, Exploits, and Executions of the Most Celebrated Sea Robbers* (Boston and Philadelphia, 1837, reprinted 1844, 1924); Laffite's less than wholly authentic story is presented on pages 63-85.

¹⁵ The Laffites received their first serious historical treatment at the hands of Charles Etienne Gayarre in volume 4 of his *History of Louisiana* (New York, 1866); Gayarre's article, "Historical Sketch of Pierre and Jean Laffite, the Famous Smugglers of Louisiana," appeared in the *Magazine of American History* in 1882. Laffite legend and history were blended by a succession of Louisiana writers, including: George Washington Cable, "Plotters and Pirates of Louisiana," *Century Magazine* (1883) and *The Creoles of Louisiana* (New York, 1886); Grace King, *New Orleans, The Place and the People* (New York, 1895); Grace King and John R. Ficklen, Jr., *Stores From Louisiana History* (New Orleans, 1905), 278-287; and Henry Castellanos, *New Orleans As It Was* (New Orleans, 1895); see also the *Historical Scrapbook and Guide to New Orleans and Environs* (New York, 1885), 188-190.

¹⁶ Lyle Saxon (1891-1946) was one of the leading lights of the New Orleans literary scene during the second quarter of the twentieth century. *Lafitte the Pirate* was his fourth major book (after *Father Mississippi* [1927], *Fabulous New Orleans* [1928], and *Old Louisiana* [1929] and it is perhaps the most widely read book about Laffite; several editions have appeared in hardcover and paperback, most recently in 1989. In 1935 Saxon was named director of the WPA Federal Writers Project in Louisiana and he was responsible for quite a bit of the Laffite legend and folklore, including some of the treasure stories, that found its way into the famous guidebooks for New Orleans (1938) and Louisiana (1945) and his folklore collection *Gumbo Ya-Ya* (reprint, 1975).

¹⁷ See, e.g., Theresa Moore Hunter, *The Saga of Jean Lafitte: Word Portraits of a Picturesque Southern Pirate: History and*

Romance of the Texas Coast (San Antonio, 1940); and Ray M. Thompson, *The Land of Lafitte the Pirate* (Gretna, La., 1943).

¹⁸ "Many of the legends concerning treasure are connected with the pirate, Jean Lafitte"; Federal Writers Project, *Louisiana*, 91; cf. Paul Serpas, *Tales of Louisiana Treasure* (Baton Rouge, 1967).

¹⁹ Typical of the innumerable local newspaper stories of various pirate treasure hunts from southwestern Louisiana and the northeast Gulf Coast in Texas will be found in the *Galveston Daily News*, 21 April 1878, 25 May 1879, 7 January 1884, 25 April 1895, 3 March 1907, 7 February 1909; the *Lake Charles Echo*, 11 April 1874, 29 March 1875, 9 September 1875, 5 January 1884, 4 July 1885, 13 January 1888; the *Lake Charles American Press* [title varies], 20 March 1914, 10 June 1932, 11 April 1940, 12 August 1979; and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 13 November 1960. Some of the very best Laffite treasure hunt writing is found in "Life and Times of Lafitte," *DeBow's Review* 11 (October 1851), 385; Maurice Elfer, "Trees Uprooted in Quest for Pirate Gold: South Louisiana Pitted by Seekers of Treasure Said to Have Been Buried by Lafitte or His Men," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 7 November 1926; Meigs O. Frost, "Bayou Folk Dig For Pirate Gold: Dream, Money Machine Point Way to Lafitte's Buried Treasure," *New Orleans States*, 17 March 1938; Rebecca Harding Davis, "Here and There in the South," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 75 (November 1887):923-924; and William Henry Perrin, ed., *Southwest Louisiana Biographical and Historical* (New Orleans, 1891), 247; and Federal Writers Project, *Louisiana*, 431.

²⁰ Nola Mae Wittler Ross, *Jean Lafitte: Louisiana Buccaneer* (Lake Charles, 1990), 53; Federal Writers Project, *Louisiana*, 286; and Maude Reid, "Origin of Some Place Names in Southwest Louisiana," *McNeese Review* 6 (1954):114; see also Ferguson, "History of Lake Charles," 12-19, an early prototype of "vernacular history" writing disguised as academic history. The earliest published notice of the connection between Laffite, Contraband Bayou, and the Lake Charles shell bank is a story printed in the *Galveston Daily News* in 1866. For a modern take on the local treasure lore, see

Mike Jones, *Adventures in Old Calcasieu* (Lake Charles, 1991), 66-67, 79-81; and Geneva Griffith, "Jean Lafitte's Buried Treasure Still Elusive," *Lake Charles American Press*, 15 November 1981; and the *American Press*, 3 May and 6 May 1998. The pirate Henry Morgan is also associated with Contraband Bayou and is alleged to have hidden along its banks in 1662; "The Legend of Contraband Bayou Adds Romance to School Paper's Name," *McNeese Junior College Contraband*, 3 November 1939.

²¹ *Lake Charles American*, 30 April, 1909; the special report filed by a reporter covering the trial carried the headline, "Choate, the Treasure Hunter of White Lake is Convicted: Report of Trial Will Interest Lake Charles People Who Have Done Some Exploring Themselves"; a slightly different version of the same story appeared under the headline, "The Treasures of Lafitte," in the *Galveston Daily News*, 27 October 1908. Stories of another "treasure vault," this time near Grand Chenier, aroused treasure seekers twenty years later; *Lake Charles American Press*, 12 May 1938.

²² Federal Writers Project, *Louisiana*, 410.

²³ The best compilation of regional treasure lore is in Dobie, *Coronado's Children*, 306-332; see also Jesse Ziegler, *Wave of the Gulf* (San Antonio, 1938), 194-197; J. Frank Dobie, "Patriot or Pirate, Lafitte's Footprints Still Imbedded in Gulf Coast," *Daily News* (Galveston), 11 April 1942; and W. T. Block, "Buried Treasure of Jean Lafitte," *Frontier Times* 1 (May 1924):24-26.

²⁴ W. T. Block, *History of Jefferson County, Texas, From Wilderness to Reconstruction* (Nederland, Tex., 1976), 14-15; see also W. T. Block, "Treasure Tale Keyed Digging in East Texas Piney Woods," *Enterprise* (Beaumont), 15 May 1999; and cf. Dobie, *Coronado's Children*, 326-327. Block, a retired journalist and college instructor residing in Nederland, Texas, has written widely about Laffite lore from East Texas and Southwest Louisiana; several of his buried treasure stories are posted on his website (www.wtblock.com).

²⁵ Carroll Lewis, *Treasures of Galveston Bay* (Waco, 1966). Well written and illustrated, this handsome little book is an exemplar of the genre.

²⁶ See Charles W. Hayes, *Galveston: History of the Island and the City*, 2 vols., reprint (Austin, 1974), I:128-130, 276, 610; Lewis Publishing Company, *History of Texas Together with a Biographical History of the Cities of Houston and Galveston* (Chicago, 1895), 729-730; and Trustram Potter Coffin and Henning Cohen, eds., *The Parade of Heroes: Legendary Figures in American Lore* (Garden City, N.J., 1978), 281-283; see also the *Galveston Dailey News*, 4 January 1875, 21 April 1878, 25 May 1879, 6 March 1893, 3 March 1907, and 22 October 1922. A Galveston dentist, Dr. J. O. Dyer, included many Laffite treasure tales in the forty-four "historical" articles he wrote for the *Galveston Daily News* between 1920 and 1924; Dyer Scrapbook, Rosenberg Library (Galveston).

²⁷ Dobie, *Coronado's Children*, 323-325; Eugenia Reynolds Briscoe, "A Narrative History of Corpus Christi, Texas, 1519-1875," Ph.D. dissertation (Denver University, 1972), 57; Dee Woods, "Adventures of Lafitte in the Gulf Coast Area," *Corpus Christi Caller*, 7 June 1940; Kathy Arnold, "Legacy of Lafitte," *Corpus Christi Times* [magazine], 6 (September 1985):60-61; and Murphy Givens, "Coast is Loaded with Legends of Lost Treasures," *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, 3 June 1998.

²⁸ Laffite's "fort" on Galveston held a special fascination for early Anglo American visitors to the island; see William Bollaert, "Life of Jean Lafitte, the Pirate of the Mexican Gulf," *Littell's Living Age* 32 (1852):433-446; William Bollaert's *Texas*, ed. W. Eugene Hollon and Ruth Lapham Butler (Norman, 1956), 14-17, 84. Anecdotal accounts of Laffite's fort and reputed house ("Maison Rouge") can be found in Hayes, *Galveston*, I:128, 276.

²⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, 15 September 1903, 23 January and 11 February 1970; *Houston Post*, 12 August and 9 September 1969, 22 June 1980. The tale of the sunken "pirate ship" widely believed to be near the mouth of the Mermentau River seems to have originated with James Campbell, a self-proclaimed Laffite "lieutenant," who lived on Galveston Bay; in their old age, Campbell and his wife both gave interviews about the wreck of the privateer *Hotspur* off the mouth of the Mermentau River; see *Galveston Dailey News*, 25 April 1895 and

6 August 1897. In 1975 local fishermen led a University of Southwestern Louisiana anthropologist to an old wreck which they claimed as a "pirate ship," located several hundred yards south of where the Bayou Queue de Tortue enters the Mermentau; Jon L. Gibson, "Sunken Vessel Report," in *An Archaeological Survey of the Mermentau River and Bayous Nezpique and Des Cannes* (Lafayette, 1975), 101. The search for early shipwreck sites, including purported pirate wrecks, occasionally overlaps with the federal government's mandate for cultural resource management; see Charles E. Peterson, et al., *A History of Waterborne Commerce within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers New Orleans District and Inventory of Known Underwater Cultural Resources* (New Orleans, 1989); Charles E. Pearson, Thomas C. Birchett, and George J. Castille, *Historic Navigation and Shipwreck Study, Lower Atchafalaya Basin Re-Evaluation, South Central Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, 2001); see also U.S. Department of the Interior, Minerals Management Service, "Historic Shipwrecks in the Gulf of Mexico" website

(www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/regulate/envir on/archaeological/shipwrecks.html).

³⁰ J. H. Harry, "History of Chambers County, Texas," M.A. thesis (University of Texas, 1940), 17-18; notes of an interview with Ralph T. Lagou of Anahuac by Peggy L., 1978; affidavit of W. N. Sherman of Beaumont, notarized in Jefferson County, Texas, 2 February 1978; these and other materials relating to the "Lafitte Ship" in Lake Miller have been collected by the research library staff at the Wallisville Heritage Park and Museum.

³¹ *Houston Chronicle*, 31 May 1935; *The Progress*, 6 June 1935.

³² *Houston Post*, 30 December 1939 and 11 June 1940; *Austin American*, 9 July 1940; *Liberty Vindicator*, 12 June 1940; "Lafitte Ship" file. Sherman's partners in the first Miller Lake expedition were Grover Cleveland Chambliss, Jr., of Beaumont and B. F. Williams of Anahuac; they also had backing from the Herbert interests in Houston. The treasure hunters retained the services of Price Daniel (1910-1988), a lawyer and sitting state representative from Liberty, to represent them in their request for a state permit to explore for a "certain boat

known as Jean Lafitte's flag ship." Daniel went on to serve as United States senator, governor, and state supreme court justice, and in 1969 he purchased the *Journal of Jean Laffite* from two Texas document dealers, which he later donated it to the Sam Houston Regional Library at Liberty.

³³ K & B Exploration Company was owned by B. J. Krigar and Leo T. Behne, Jr. (1927-1999) of Houston. Krigar and Behne were army veterans who had acquired some World War II surplus mine detectors.

³⁴ *Houston Post*, 19 August 1949, 25 August 1949, 28 August 1949, and 4 September 1949; *The Progress*, 25 August 1949 and 8 September 1949; "Lafitte Ship" file. The Land Commissioner was Giles Bascom (b. 1900), who had headed the Land Office from 1938 until 1955; he was later forced to resign over the Veterans Land Bank scandal and served time in prison.

³⁵ The treasure hunters may have been deterred by the presence of John A. Lafitte (sic) of St. Joseph, Missouri, who read about the Lake Miller expedition in his local newspaper [*St. Joseph News Dispatch*, 19 August 1949]; Lafitte, who claimed to be the great-grandson of the pirate, suggested that he had a right to a share in any treasure recovered; Lafitte to E. H. Sherman, 22 August 1949, "Lafitte Ship" file. John A. Lafitte was the perpetrator of the Laffite Journals hoax. The Lake Miller shipwreck site is now controlled by the Army Corps of Engineers and is off-limits to treasure hunters.

³⁶ Alexander Graham Bell is credited with inventing the first metal detecting device in 1881 and a crude portable metal detector was patented by Gerhard Fischar in 1925; the first practical metal detectors were used during World War II to detect land mines; after the war, civilians started purchasing army surplus mine detectors for treasure hunting. Hand-held metal detectors using very low frequency (VLF) technology appeared in the 1960's; Roy T. Roberts, "The History of Metal Detectors," *Western & Eastern Treasures*, September 1999.

³⁷ See, e.g., Successful Treasure Hunting, "Who Hunts for Treasure?" (www.th-ers.com/who.shtml); All Kinds of Buried Treasure (www.oldandsold.com); International Treasure Exchange (www.treasure.com); Alan Hassell, "Lure of

Pirate Treasure" (www.treasurenet.com), last updated 1998; the Bounty Hunter Metal Detectors site (www.detecting.com); and Thomas Thomas, "Tom's Personal Metal Detecting and Treasure Hunting Web Page" (www.thomasthomas.com).

³⁸ The modern treasure hunter's fascination with Laffite shows no signs of letting up; see, e.g., Jack Beater, *Pirates and Buried Treasure* (St. Petersburg, Fla., 1959); W. C. C. Jameson and W. C. Jameson, *Buried Treasures of Texas: Legends of Outlaw*

Loot, Pirate Hoards, Buried Mines, Ingots in Lakes, and Santa Anna's Pack-Train Gold (August House Publishers, 1991); Cameron Platt and John Wright, *Treasure Islands: The Fascinating World of Pirates, Buried Treasure, and Fortune Hunters* (Golden, Co., n.d.). The Coin World website has a roster of "State Treasures Waiting to be Found" that lists several Laffite treasures in Louisiana and Texas (www.coinworld.com). Laffite items also appear regularly in treasure hunter magazines and newsletters.

The Man from Cayo Cristo

Dr. Rafael Rasco

Edited and translated by Gary Fretz and Elena Garcia, GAFD and ATC

*Editor's note: According to author, Dr. Rafael Rasco, Jean Laffite set up a base of operations on the north coast of Cuba on Cayo Christo around 1821 after leaving Galveston. He brought a wife there from Louisiana and had a daughter with her. Their alleged descendants still live in the area and Dr. Rasco is one of them. The story is told in Dr. Rasco's book **From Guacamaya To The Mountains** published in Spanish in Miami in 1972. The story was originally told to Rasco's grandmother by Maria Rodriguez Alonso, the daughter of Jean Laffite. Dr. Rafael Rasco was born in Sagua La Grande, Cuba, around 1916. He moved to Havana and earned a degree in Diplomacy and a Doctorate in law from Havana University. He wrote short stories and novels and was a regular writer for **El Diario de la Marina**. Persecuted by the communist government, he fled the country in 1960 and made his way through several Latin American countries and ended up in Long Island, New York where he taught Spanish and literature at C.W. Post University. Dr. Rasco passed away around 2001. We spoke to his son who is an investment banker on Wall Street and who has relatives in Sagua La Grande. It's too bad that Dr. Rasco passed away before we could interview him.*

We attempted some genealogical research in the Church of Sagua La Grande to corroborate Dr. Rasco's story and found some reference to a Maria Rodriguez (supposedly Jean Laffite's daughter) in the 1840's but because of a church fire, many records were lost. The Cuban government does not support genealogical research at this time so the Roman Catholic Church is the only resource we could use....Here is his story:

Once upon a time and almost lost to memory, but still remembered by some a few years ago, people spoke about an island called Cayo Cristo. The island is close to the Port of Isabela, from where the Undosa River flows into the ocean after passing by the village of Sagua La Grande and coming from even further away as far as the town of Santo Domingo in the province of Las Villas.

Back at the turn of the 19th Century, that island had a very peculiar population of men of the sea. They were fishermen, traders, and some dedicated to that "other" business that needed much help from the authorities.

I am talking about piracy, which sometimes aside of being a necessity (due to the commercial monopoly that the island suffered from for many years) was also very profitable. Like the modern financiers who trade in the market and in a moment of luck can either turn into millionaires or lose everything, those gentlemen of Cayo Cristo had their ups and downs. Back then they used to say that the "arm" (of the law) was very far away, coming from Santa Clara...and the warehouse where they stored goods to be distributed was at the Caves of Jumanagua. This became a way of earning a living. If it was not legal, it was at least tolerated and life went on among the peaceful population of Cayo Cristo. Some of them were known for their not-so-stellar reputation and they were called "Muslims", meaning semi-retired pirates or buccaneers.

Incredible stories about what there was inside those houses circulated around. They spoke about gold-embroidered quilts and tablecloths, treasure chests buried in Cayo Cristo and also on nearby Cayo Esquivel. There were scary

stories about old people pleading that when they died they wanted their ears covered to avoid hearing the voices of the spirits of all the people they had assassinated after stealing their valuables, or the voices of those abandoned on secluded beaches during low tide with their bodies buried in the sand up to their neck so they would slowly drown with the change of the tide.

One day in the year 1821, a ship under the command of a distinguished man with a Moorish look and a crew of fourteen men arrived at the island and stayed. Later on, it was known that the captain had brought his wife with him. Only a few had seen her because she did not leave the ship until her new house was ready to receive her. The captain said his name was "Breton" and he also said he was half Spanish and half French admitting to speaking both languages. He sometimes went away with his men leaving the wife alone in the house. She would not go out unless he was back at home. On one of his trips he brought her a clavichord. The beautiful, young wife played that instrument very gracefully but only for the husband and in the house.

Most people did not even know what she looked like because they had not seen her and nobody would ask about this. Captain Breton appeared to be an expert with the sword and had a reputation to be very good with firearms. In other words, in that small and isolated community of Cayo Cristo the main character of this story was like royalty in asylum. He acted very different from the other people and looked especially distinguished in comparison to the rest of the men that came with him. Nevertheless, he understood his people. He got along with everybody and was highly respected by the entire population.

The years went by and Breton's daughter Maria (the only child they had) was growing up, but that lifestyle of trading free of taxes was sometimes difficult. The Captain's trips started becoming longer. It was a mystery about how and where he got the money to keep their luxurious lifestyle.

One day, and this will help us understand another aspect of his personality, a ship with American registry broke down near Cayo Cristo. While the ship was being repaired, the second-in-command came to town and after having a few drinks he lost control of himself and got into a fight. The fight was broken up but after a while, armed with a pistol, he went house to house looking for his aggressors until he reached Captain Breton's house. Breton surprised everybody by talking to the drunk in perfect English (it was not known that he spoke this language) and he chased the man out with a pistol. The drunk was chased all the way to his longboat that took him to his ship.

The talk of the town (like any small town that didn't have much excitement) was the cloistered life that Breton's wife lived during his trips away. Her beauty, her refined manners and her ability with the clavichord (which other women were not familiar with in that town) had the town very intrigued. Some details about the life of the Bretons were known. Their domestic employees, with the exception of a black one named Yambi, would make comments about how the family lived. Yambi was Breton's faithful employee and never made any comments. It was known that the Bretons usually spoke French in the house, although they spoke Spanish with the townspeople and servants. In some cases, when they didn't want anyone to understand, they would speak English among themselves. The captain would speak to Yambi in English, most likely to keep the other workers out of their conversation.

A group of people who came to the island were very curious about the Bretons and decided to pay a visit and meet the Captain. Among the group was a priest who spoke French and had a great time talking to Captain Breton and his wife. The luxurious dinner service and silver and gold dinnerware had an aristocratic style that left everyone amazed. But none of the visitors were able to arrive at any conclusion about the Bretons' origins. Nobody had a clear idea of who they really were or where they came from or if they were not what they pretended to be.

The daughter was growing up surrounded by the mysterious origin of her parents which without any doubt seemed to be very different from the rest of the inhabitants of the island. There were rumors saying that he was an exiled nobleman, maybe a retired corsair or a pirate chief who lived in this tranquil refuge to enjoy his wealth. They said the trips were only an excuse, that his real wealth was kept in treasure chests and that he had many of them buried in special places for the future.

Concerning the beautiful and refined Mrs. Breton, people said that there was no question she came from a wealthy and noble family that gave her a very special education. This was very obvious. Like him, she spoke several languages and played that clavichord in the peaceful nights of Cayo Cristo and it sounded like heavenly music. Her beauty, her clavichord and her special personality had Captain Breton (or whatever his real name was) completely enchanted.

In time, the legend of The Man From Cayo Cristo would take the most diverse shapes. There were rumors about him in the neighboring towns of Isabela and Sagua La Grande. People said that the daughter looked more and more like her mother as she grew up. They also talked about her mother, in the absence of proper schooling in this remote place, had taken on the education of her daughter. In that house of Breton, full of refinement, a flower was flourishing, but she was also affected by melancholy. There were many things she did not know and she didn't dare to ask.... Her intuition told her that she shouldn't ask about all those things that were part of the mystery surrounding their life, especially anything relating to a subject always kept in secret: her parents' past. The girl who was becoming older observed that there was a room in the house that was always closed and that was locked at all times when her father left on those mysterious ocean trips.

One day, she couldn't wait anymore and asked her mother what was in that room and why was it always locked?

- "Sweetheart," the mother said, "In that room is a treasure chest with documents and important papers of your father and he wants it locked."
- "But my father... he has secrets?"
- "Oh...all men have them, and the woman who wants to know them has to be discrete."
- "Mother, there are many things I wish to know about my father, about you and about myself. Where are you both from?"
- "You will know everything in time. You'll learn everything and that day you will understand many things and you will be proud of who you are, but that time has not come yet. You still have to wait."

Little Maria remained quiet but full of curiosity. Everything she had overheard in town came to her mind such as comments with double-meanings and envious phrases. She started analyzing the strange life of her mother. She lived only for her father and even though he seemed to adore her, she was like a prisoner-queen.

And what about that treasure chest? What did it have inside? Did it only have papers? Was it full of gold coins? Maybe he was the chief of a group of pirates that robbed, looted and killed and this was his normal way of making a living? Maybe her mother was his captive...but a love captive...and this is why she hid from the world? She couldn't hold it in anymore and on the secluded beach where she was analyzing all this, she broke into tears. Then all of a sudden, the sound of that conch that they used as a horn brought her back from her daydreaming. It was the sound of her father's boat. She got up and went towards them... She noticed that her father was not with them. This surprised her because he was usually leading them. The faces of these men that were less trustworthy as she grew up had very weird expressions. They looked very serious and sad; she had never seen them like this before. They were walking towards her house without mentioning her father. Where was he? She realized

something serious had happened....She followed them convinced that she would find out as soon as he got home. So to her house they all went and there explained to her mother what had happened. The Captain had died; they said from a fever that killed him in just a few days. Soon the news traveled through the island: Captain Breton had died on the faraway coast of Yucatan. Since it was so far away, they couldn't bring his body back. He was given a Christian burial in a town not far from where he died. These tough men acted like children; they didn't know what to do. The widow – who only lived for him – appeared paralyzed. She wandered around, silently, hardly eating...she never played the clavichord again.

Everything that belonged to Breton died with him. Everything that surrounded his life disappeared as mysteriously as he did. His men left and never came back. Later on there were rumors that the widow gave them the ship and they, without a leader, preferred to go somewhere else. One evening, around dusk, they left Cayo Cristo and disappeared. They never came back nor did any other ship related to that mysterious man that had become a legend. The widow, Breton's beautiful and young wife started aging like a rose past its prime. She aged quickly, got sick and soon after died.

Maria, who was already eighteen and who was still with two of the former servants and the faithful Yambi (who professed the daughter the same loyalty he gave her father) had no more reason to live in Cayo Cristo. She moved to Sagua La Grande, where she became known as Maria Rodriguez. Before departing, she gave away many things and sold others. The talk about all the wealth of the family again ran through the little town.

The townspeople were disappointed when she moved out. They were expecting to see big treasure chests full of gold and silver but this didn't happen. Maria, wisely advised by Yambi, had taken her precautions. Yambi had a small fishing boat and one night took that treasure chest that had intrigued Maria so much when she was

a child. He took it to the house that Maria had bought in Sagua La Grande not long after her mother had died and she decided to leave Cayo Cristo. After Maria left Cayo Cristo, the last vestige of Captain Breton disappeared. The only thing left was the legend that is still around about that pirate and his beautiful captive lover, a captive for love.

Many years went by and what happened with this story is the same as what happens with wine....it got better as it aged. Maria married a man with the last name of Alonso, she had a family and they were happy. She grew old and finally felt that pride about her origin that her mother spoke about. Indeed, she understood everything now and also justified her mother's existence. She finally knew that her mother was not a prisoner but a lucky lover who escaped with the man she loved and got to share with him a paradise of happiness. Finally Maria was happy and as the years passed she saw the story from another perspective. Far from trying to hide it, she liked to talk about it and to remember those early years.

One day, my grandmother was talking to Maria. At that time she was known as Mariquita because she was already seventy-three years old. Her daughter, Alicia had married my grandmother's brother, Juan Antonio Someillan. (Editor's note: According to the *Gaceta de Colombia* and the *Gaceta de Cartagena*, after Jean Lafitte died, the third-in-command of his ship, Francisco Someillan, captained the ship back to Cartagena. This is a rare French surname and these Someillans may be related). In between conversations, they spoke about Cayo Cristo and its old inhabitants.

Dona Mariquita, who developed a sense of humor with age, told my grandmother: "The truth is that those of us who were born on the island are descendants of buccaneers, pirates and smugglers, but who cares? Next to so many thieves, elegantly dressed and even with big titles like the doctors you see nowadays, our pirates had what these others lack: personality and

courage! Besides, there is nothing more romantic than being kidnapped by the pirate who is also the man you love. In other words, I would say that seeing the way they were and how they risked their lives every day, not only am I not ashamed of who I am but I am also proud of my origin."

"But your father was Captain Breton, wasn't he?" my grandmother asked.

"Yes and no," Dona Mariquita replied. "He was known in the key by that name and also by the name of Rodriguez, which is the name I have now, but that wasn't his real name. I only knew this years later, after he had died."

Bringing back past memories, she continued: "My mother told me everything one day...poor woman, she didn't live long after that; she could not endure the separation any longer. She followed him soon after he died." Without being able to cover her emotions any longer she continued. "My mother belonged to one of the most distinguished families of Louisiana and they lived on a plantation north of New Orleans, which was one of the places my father visited frequently. She was educated at Ursulines in New Orleans, the school for young ladies of the high class... being prepared for a great marriage, but she fell in love with a man that was not exactly what her family wanted for her. She fell in love with him and he fell in love with her. This was a secret love because he, who was a gentleman, never wanted anything from his bad reputation affecting her. She thought that is why my mother said that 'he doesn't deserve her'. This is why it was always a secret because he knew that one day he would have to leave and he didn't want to be known that she had been the pirate's girlfriend, especially when people spread rumors that she had been his lover. He knew the games of society and he knew they feared and respected him, but they were also capable of betraying him."

After a few seconds and remembering many things she had not examined in a long time she said: "This is why the night he came to say goodbye, after he explained why he was leaving (Louisiana), she didn't think twice

about leaving with him. He didn't want to take her, but she asked and begged him, she told him that the day he was not next to her, that would be her death, as it happened later on. This is why, due to the extreme secrecy of this love that was not suspected by anyone, people thought he had kidnapped the most beautiful flower of New Orleans. Nobody knew the truth, that it was she who asked him to take her with him. They vanished from Louisiana and nobody there ever heard from them anymore."

Moments later, my grandmother, who was very interested in this story asked her, "And when did this all happen?" "In 1821," Mariquita then started at the beginning of the whole story: "My father arrived in New Orleans the year the United States purchased Louisiana and soon became a respectable citizen in this locale. My mother told me he was friends with the most important men and she mentioned some of them like Morel and Grymes who were lawyers. Mr. Sauvinet helped him with money and Latour, who I met years later, was a lieutenant who came to visit him at Cayo Cristo from Isabela along with many others. Well, the war came and my father offered his support (more than 1,000 men and some naval ships) and thanks to his help, New Orleans didn't fall into British hands. After the victory, my father realized that even after everything he had done, he was not accepted by most. Things were changing, the Spanish and French style of living was disappearing. There were many new faces, he realized that he didn't belong here in this new society and decided to leave those places in which he had lived all those years - Grande Terre, Barataria, Caminada, New Orleans and he left, vanishing from Louisiana. In part, also because his establishment had been destroyed, his wealth greatly depleted, he was marked with a reputation of being a pirate, a vulgar and bloody pirate, he who was a corsair, who had his privateer's license given to him by the Port of Cartagena, in the republic of Colombia." At this point, Dona Mariquita opened the treasure chest that had belonged to her father, took out an old Letter of Marque and showed it to my grandmother as

she continued. "This one was from Colombia, but he had another one from Mexico. It was strange... that even though he was French, he never tried to get one from France. Maybe because he was Bonapartist or because of the distance. I don't know it and then Dona Mariquita grabbed a miniature and a drawing of a ship and showed it to my grandmother.... "This is a miniature of Napoleon that my father appreciated a lot; Jean Baptiste Sel who had painted it, gave it to him. Jean Baptiste's daughter was married with an uncle of mine (who I never met) but he was one of many names that my mother used to talk about.

Continuing with her story, she told my grandmother, "Yes, my father was a Bonapartist. He and a group of people were preparing an expedition to rescue Napoleon from Santa Elena, but it didn't happen because Napoleon died. They were going to use this ship – and she showed my grandmother the drawing of the ship she had placed on the table next to Napoleon's miniature – it was called LA SERAFINA and the group of patriots was large. My mother said that there were many names of very well known people from New Orleans such as Girod, General Lallemand, Bossiere, and of course, that one other person my father called Uncle Dominique. He came to visit us one time at Cayo Cristo. I remember him very well, a small chubby man, very lively and talkative." "That Bossiere," my grandmother interrupted, "was he a French sailor?" "Yes, he was French and I think he was the owner of the ship they were going to use to rescue Napoleon.. Yes, he was Saint Ange Bossiere" my grandmother clarified, I know him, he was married to my grandmother whose family was from New Orleans. She lived there back then, he was her first husband, leaving her a widow after his tragic end. "Most likely is the same person," Dona Mariquita said, "My mother used to say that he was known for his bad temper, there were some stories that proved that. Well, going back, my father left Louisiana in 1817, taking his men with him, that big group that had its base of operations in Barataria. He had to leave; after all he had done for the population from whom he didn't even get a

wooden medallion, as my mother used to say."

Taking pause in that long story, Dona Mariquita went back to put the treasures in her father's chest, continuing later with her conversation: "He left Louisiana and after looking a lot, he decided to establish himself in a similar place to the one he had left, and he did so on the coast of Texas, on an island he named Campeche. He didn't last long there either; four years later he had to abandon the place and he burned his house destroying everything he had there. This time, disappointed about life, my father left with the woman he had always loved, to that remote and isolated place where I was born: Cayo Cristo."

She continued explaining to my grandmother how her father had disappeared from the world he had lived in. His men spread out throughout the Gulf, each one taking his own way and father after reuniting with my mother came in the only ship he wanted to keep, VICTORIA. He used to say that this name was an irony. They came to Cayo Cristo, to that secluded place where nobody knew him. That was my father; this is his story, that's how Jean Laffite was. He was a pirate, yes, but he was also loyal to a country that never understood him and to which its destiny could have been very different if it was not for the help of my father in such a decisive moment. I could also add that he was a good friend, a good husband and a good father. Life takes you to paths that sometimes you don't know where they are going to end, and he ended up being the last pirate of those times, when men were real men."

And at the end of her long conversation with Dona Mariquita, my grandmother asked a few more questions to clarify some items about the main character of this story, to which Dona Mariquita replied: "Indeed my father was a ladies man – like any other man – but not because he chased them. The women, and he had several, fell in love with him. He was a widower from a previous marriage – but he never spoke of this – My mother told me that a daughter from that marriage was with him when he had to leave Campeche in 1821.

(Editor's note: Jeannette?) He left her with friends of the family and some years later, after he was living in Cayo Cristo he went to her wedding. It seems that she married very well. I never heard anything about her again. I do remember that my father had said that he finally had a daughter by the name of Maria, which was his mother's name, but he never spoke about her either. I was named Maria after my mother."

"Maria?", asked my grandmother.

"Marie, in French, and then she revealed something else....Marie Dubois was my mother's name" (Editor's note: we checked with Ursulines Academy in New Orleans for a Marie Dubois who would have attended between the years 1800-1815 and there were no Marie Dubois' listed in their records; however they added that there were a number of Marias with no last name recorded that could be this person. Records from this era are scant and not very legible).

After these words, Dona Mariquita looked tired after this conversation that had made her look in her distant memories to recall names, dates and anecdotes and she then stayed quiet for a while.

Dona Mariquita came back to the subject and told my grandmother:

"My father's men, even though they had the typical rough appearance of sailors, were not bad people. I remember them, I was a bit afraid of them and, just in case you are interested, I have this notebook where my father wrote their names. Taking the notebook, she gave it to my grandmother who read "Antonio Angelo, Pedro Fernandez, Juan Juanillo, Jose Recio, Manuel Lopez, Mateo Zambrana, Pedro Liguete, Diego Salgado."

My grandmother stopped reading because at that point Dona Mariquita went to the living room and called her. "Here I keep my most precious memory from those times which is that part of the story I just told you, and pointing to one corner of the living room she showed me a piece of furniture kept there like a relic. "My mother's clavichord, here it is, this was the true

treasure of the pirate, which to me is more valuable than all the gold in the world." Sitting down at the instrument, her fingers moved over the keys.

Conclusion:

This little known version about the final days in the life of the gentleman of the seas, Jean Lafitte – buccaneer, pirate, patriot, and adventurer – and of his life on Cayo Cristo, was almost kept a secret by the townspeople of my village, Sagua La Grande. This story came to me from my grandmother's side of the family. My great grandmother Felicite de Lamarlere-Galuchat was married in her first marriage to the famous French sailor Saint Ange Bossiere. After his death, she married Jean Baptiste Someillan, whose grandson – my grandmother's brother – later on married Alicia Alonso, Dona Mariquita's daughter and Jean Lafitte's granddaughter. Through my grandmother who knew Dona Mariquita and who told her many years ago, in 1895 – when the latter was seventy-three and my grandmother was thirty-four – is how I know the story. (Editor's note: this means Lafitte's daughter was born in 1821-22). This is how I learned the story related to Cayo Cristo and this man who was probably the last of the romantic era of buccaneers, an era that is history.

Lastly, this story is not intended to be an historical document because it is influenced by the emotions of the orally transmitted legends. These types of stories are above history itself and are part of the patrimony of the places and they live in the cultural traditions even after factual history has been forgotten.

And this is how the story ends, this is how the man – with a unique personality, who had all the virtues and defects of his time – enters history as a legend, going – from the lively New Orleans to the secluded Grande Terre, then to Campeche... From there to the remote Cayo Cristo. From this place, he enters history surrounded by the magic of his legend, always surrounded by that group of strong sailors with strong voices that sang the song of the pirates of Barataria.

And I end this story about the man who lived in Cayo Cristo for a while and who originated that legend that was around in my grandmother's time. I want to end this story with the last verses of Lord Byron's poem that expresses – with the singular musicality characteristic of this poet – what this

mysterious man – our character –left through his life; these words sound like they were written for him:

“He left a corsair's name
To other times,
linked with one virtue and
A thousand crimes”

TIMELINE OF JEAN LAFFITE SIGHTINGS

April 1820: A French real estate development near Cauno and Salado, near present day Cienfuegos, Cuba sold a ranch to a Jean Laffitte. Many French people settled here.

January 1822: It was reported that Jean Laffite's ship was destroyed by an English brig. Laffite swam to shore near Santa Cruz del Sur, Cuba, and was captured and jailed in Puerto Principe (modern day Camaguey) for several weeks. He faked a severe illness that allowed him to be hospitalized in a low-security hospital in San Juan del Dios and escaped on the night of February 13, 1822.

March 19, 1822: The governor of Puerto Principe reports that “the pirate Jean Laffite is in a small two-master with 30 men in the anchorage of Rincon Grande, 1 league from Viaro adjacent to Boca Carabela.” *(Editor's note: this is near the subject area where Laffite supposedly had a wife...one translation of the Spanish “Rincon Grande” means “large hideout”....)*

April 11, 1822: Laffite was reportedly with a group of four pirate vessels including the Colombian privateering schooner named CIENEGO near Xibara, on the north coast of Cuba (reported by the *Louisiana Gazette* of June 18, 1822). This group of 180-200 pirates was being pursued by the U.S. Navy vessel ALLIGATOR for plundering an American sloop named JAY off Xibara and a Scottish brig (whose entire crew were murdered off St. Domingue). ALLIGATOR captured CIENEGO off Nuevitas, Cuba after the crew had mutinied. The pirates were selling the plundered goods in Xibara and in Holguin for “One doubloon per horseload” under the protection of the Governor of Holguin and the commandant of the fort at Xibara. Some of the stolen goods were seen in the house of the Commandant of the fort and this angered the American Navy men. The Navy vessels caught up with the four pirate vessels but the pirates escaped by sailing shallow draft boats over the shallow reefs where the Navy vessels could not venture because of their deep draft. ALLIGATOR departed the area on May 18, 1822 as the pirates had vanished.

May 18, 1822: The armed Colombian schooner GENERAL SANTANDER departed Santiago de Cuba bound for Curacao and Cartagena. It is believed that JL was on board this voyage.

August 19, 1822 the GENERAL SANTANDER received her privateering commission and Letters of Marque from the Colombian government while she was in Cartagena (according to the Colombian Secretary of War and Marine Affairs records housed in the National Archives).

September 4, 1822 the *National Gazette* of Philadelphia reported that "...the famous Laffite acquired command of a 40 ton ship (the GENERAL SANTANDER) in Cartagena and was making preparations to embark on a privateering voyage".

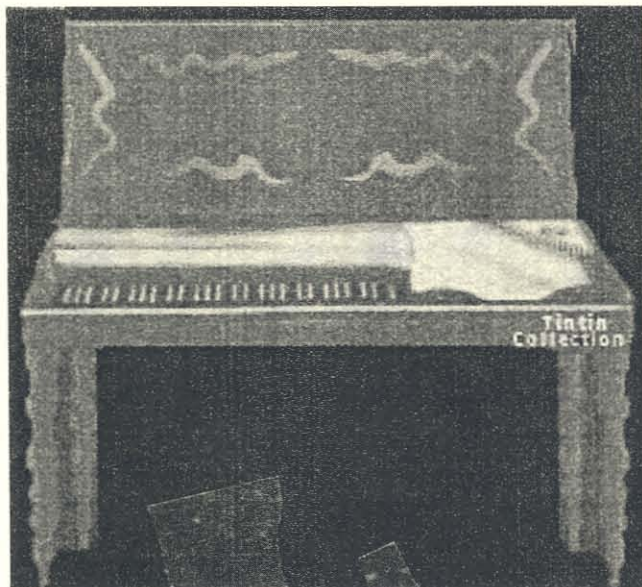
November 26, 1822: Laffite encountered the schooner COLUMBUS ROSS (sailing from Jamaica to New Orleans) 60 miles west of Grand Cayman while captaining the GENERAL SANTANDER. He told the captain he left Cartagena around August 21 and he captured two Spanish vessels that were sent back to Cartagena for adjudication.

March 19, 1823: GACETA de CARTAGENA reports that JL died in a naval battle in the service of Simon Bolivar off the coast of Omoa, Honduras on February 4, 1823. Franco Simeillan assumed control of the GENERAL SANTANDER after Laffite died and he is recorded as returning to Cartagena on March 10, 1823 with captured goods consigned to a Mr Martin. The Someillan/Rasco family of Cuba claims descent from Jean Laffite and Marie Dubois.

One more note: there was a marriage recorded in the Nuestra Senora de la Asuncion church of Baracoa (Book 4, Folio 50), Cuba in March 5, 1853 and the groom Lorenzo Gustavo Laffitte (born 1835) declared that his parents were Bartolome Laffitte Mane and Zella Degas and that the paternal grandparents were Juan Laffitte (our Jean Laffite) and Juana Maria Mane. Could this be the "Marie Dubois" from Louisiana? The descendants are living in Florida and the north coast of Cuba and some claim to be descendants of Jean Laffite.

Gary Fretz, Licensed and Bonded Yacht and Ship Broker





Clavicord



Drawing of Captain Breton

Cayo Cristo - 1922





New Orleans Field Trip

Jim Nonus

The September 19, 2006 Laffite Society Meeting was held at Napoleon House in New Orleans.

In attendance:

Jim Nonus, Clifford Johnson
Diane Olson, Dale Olson
Lizette Gaudin, George Najarian
Don Marler, Sybil Marler
Tom Shehan, Claudette Braly
Rob Peterson, Carolyn Peterson
Cindy Nobles, Pam Gilbert,
Jean Epperson
Jonathan Deiss, Charles Duhley

The Guest Speaker was Betje Black Klier PhD.

The Laffite Society Meeting was well attended and offered out-of-state members a better opportunity to attend a monthly meeting. It is our hope to have a meeting once a year in New Orleans, the city whose name is synonymous with that of Jean Laffite. It was a pleasure to wine and dine in the historic city with the Spanish-French colonial charm that hasn't changed in hundreds of years despite storms of savage intensity. A presence still exist there that no wind can blow away and no tide can wash away. If there is anything missing in New Orleans today it is your presence. The sooner the tourist return to the Crescent City the

sooner the *Vieux Carrie* will began to bloom with the scent of magnolia and bougainvillea.

Laffite Society members and guests visited our old and favorite haunts such as Cafe du Monde, Irene's, Galatois, Petunias, The Gumbo Shoppe and Laffite's Blacksmith Shop. Napoleon House rolled out the red carpet and gave us the velvet glove treatment and a warm welcome that made us feel as if we had just returned home from a long journey. A similar sentiment was felt through out the trip. We felt as if we had returned to our roots and maybe we had.

Betje made an interesting presentation on Champ d'Asile, and an old Laffite acquaintance, General Lallemant, one of Napoleon's generals. Many new details emerge from her research, the most interesting of which is Jean Laffite's strategy for maintaining control over the intrepid general. We look forward to the publication of her book on Champ d'Asile.

For sometime now I have been collecting old newspapers from the Laffite era. What follows are samples of references to Lallemant as he appeared in the news during the time he was in the Gulf Coast area.

The American Daily Advertiser

....PHILADELPHIA....

Monday Morning, June 8, 1818.

Extract of a letter from a gentleman of respectability, residing at Natchitoches, to his friend in Washington City dated

NATCHITOCHES, May 5, 1818.

"The want of society makes this place by no means pleasant; but we may look forward to a rapid change, as the Red River Country is daily increasing its population. Emigrants are settling on its banks, above and below us; they are generally from Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia. It certainly is a delightful country; the lands fertile; the climate equal to that of Maryland. I sincerely wish the government would take possession of all to the westward of this point; at

time we shall have some fighting near us. Three Frenchmen, late officers under Bonaparte, arrived in this town from Galvestown. I sent for them, and, on examination, they stated that Gen. Lallemant, and Gen. Grego, with 69 officers, had erected a fort in that neighbourhood; that Gen. L. had observed, that he expected a larger force; that he held out the idea of settling a colony, but that there was more attention paid to military discipline than clearing lands. These men, it appears, fell in with Lallemant in Philadelphia, who promised to take them to the Tombigby to settle lands. They state, that the General has usurped such strict military power that they were compelled to abandon him. They leave this to-day for Orleans. Laffite (they say) has from eight to ten vessels in the bay of Galvestown. This is carrying on pirating in a bold manner."

French Colony near Mexico.

Extract of a letter from a French settler which was communicated for the June No. of the *L'Abeille Americaine*.

"We are established at the mouth of the River Trinity, on the Orcoquisis bluff, twenty feet above the level of the river at high water; upon this is a fine wood covered with timber; adjoining to this is the Grand Prairie, or Prairie of Tolcasitas, which is, at least, fifteen-miles from north to south; and which extends eastward to a gap that communicates with Lake Saviubine; the land is of the first quality, easily cultivated; we have around us an immense tract, which promises the richest productions to those willing to labor a little. The game course the country in flocks; there is abundance of cows, of bulls, and wild horses may be got with ease. The waters are full of fish: and our inhabitants who have surveyed east of the river say the country is still superior; it is interspersed with most beautiful lakes, watering the most magnificent hills, where there are also many animals, particularly wild goats; all this land is in sugar, cotton, and indigo.

We have already seen the chiefs of the Indian nations, we have smoked the large Indian pipe of peace; we have reciprocally made slight feasts; they come every day with provisions; we are abundantly supplied with fresh meat, and have also sufficient salt and smoked.

Our colony is established in a spacious fertile country, abundant in resources, at the mouth of a river which empties into a fine bay, where the settlement of all people might prosper as quickly as in any country in the world. We have no occasion to form any extravagant enterprise, nor to commit hostility against those who have; we make no other use of our arms than to repulse any aggressions; but we are resolved to defend the fields we have cultivated. Victims of event, none can deny us the right of our existence, the reward of our labor, our industry, and attention to social order. All is here that nature can desire, in a land abounding with every production that can be wished: we open an asylum to those men who find themselves in the same situation with us. If success crown our efforts we shall have rendered an important service to our unhappy countrymen; if, on the contrary, we should not succeed, we shall at least have the satisfaction of attempting. We have no fear of fatigue or privations in the beginning: our aim is laudable, our intentions pure and honorable, and we devoutly hope in this event we obtain the wishes and approbation of honest men, of good faith and judgment."

French Exiles.

A number of exiled French officers, to whom congress, feeling for their misfortunes, lately made a grant of land in the Alabama territory, which they no sooner got possession of, than they sold to speculators, and moved off further south, on other lands belonging to the United States, have, all at once, taken it into their heads to set up an independent military government for themselves, and pledged their lives to defend it by force of arms against all the world. The bill of rights of these patriots, and their form of government, will be found below.

Champ D'Azile, Province of Texas, 2
May 11th. 1818.

Re united by a series of the same calamities which have torn us from our homes, and scattered us suddenly in different countries, we have resolved to seek an asylum, where we may be able to recall our misfortunes, that we may draw from them useful lessons.

A vast country presents itself to us: a country abandoned by civilized men, where is only to be seen, some points occupied, or traversed by Indian tribes, who contented with the chase, leave without cultivation a territory as fertile as extended. In the adversity, of which we boast, far from its humbling our spirit, we exercise the first right granted to man, by the Author of nature, in establishing ourselves on this land, to fertilize it by our labors, and to demand from it the products it never refuses to perseverance.

We attack no one; we have no hostile intentions. We ask peace and friendship with all who surround us; and will be grateful for the kindness, which will be extended to us. We will respect the religion, the laws, the manners, and the usages of civilized nations. We will respect the independence, the customs, the mode of life of the Indian nations, whom we will not restrain, either in their hunting, or in any other point of their existence.

We will maintain with all those to whom it will be expedient, social relation and good neighborhood, as well as commercial pursuits.

Our deportment will be peaceful, active and laborious; we will be useful to the extent of our power; and will render good for good.

But if it be possible, that our situation be not respected, and that persecution may follow us to the deserts where we have sought a retreat, we ask it of all reasonable men; what defence would have been more legitimate than ours? It will be that of the most exalted. Our resolution is taken before hand. We have arms. The care of our preservation has forced it on us, to furnish ourselves with them, as men in our situation always have done. The land on which we have placed ourselves, will behold us prosper or bravely die. There we will live honora-

bly and free, or will find our tomb; and just men will grant a testimony of esteem to our memory. But we have a right to look for a more happy result, and our first care ought to be to merit the general assent, in tracing the simple regulations, which will be a guarantee of our dispositions.

We will name the place, where our colony is situated, *Champ D'Azile*.

This denomination, in recalling to us our reverses, will also recal the necessity of fixing our destiny; of setting up anew our household gods; in a word of creating a new country.

The Colony, essentially agricultural and commercial, will be military for its preservation.

It will be divided into cohorts:

Each cohort will have a chief, who will be required to keep a register of the persons who compose it, and to preserve it in order.

A general register formed from that of the cohorts, will be kept by the direction of the Colony.

The cohorts will be collected in the same place, that they may be the better protected from insult, and that each one may live tranquilly under the protection of all.

A Colonial Code shall forthwith be made to guarantee safety and property; to prevent and repress wrongs; to secure the peace of just men, and to curb the evil intentions of the wicked.

FROM THE NEW YORK DAILY ADVERTISER.

It is somewhat amusing to find such a degree of uneasiness among a certain description of politicians, in various parts of the country, at the recent intelligence of the establishment and views of the French colony, in the province of Texas. As this colony is made up of Frenchmen who are the devoted pupils of Bonaparte, many of them officers of distinction, there seems now to be some additional fear of its consequences, arising from this very fact. It is curious, that a circumstance which was, of itself, the source of a great part if not the whole of the sympathy, which our government experienced towards these people, and which induced them to make them so liberal a sale of land in our southern territory, should now prove the cause of assailing spirits of the United States. And yet these leaders were in a great measure destitute of means to carry on their undertaking, or talents and character to warrant the expectation of success. But the principal officers in the French colony are men of high military character, of long experience, of tried bravery, and splendid talents. Unless the attempt to dislodge them shall be made in season, we very much believe it will be made in vain.

It must be a mortifying reflection to the government, that they suffered their old yearning for revolutionary France to lead them into the hobble in which they now find themselves. We do not believe that any other set of emigrants than French, could have obtained a tract of territory from government with such ease and promptitude. Last winter an attempt was made by the principal Irish emigrants in this country, to purchase from Congress a tract of land for the settlement of their countrymen, who flock in great numbers to the United States, but without success. Now there is no distinguished military characters among the Irishmen, to render them formidable upon our frontiers; still Congress would not listen to their application. But

Frenchmen, made up of military characters alone, and above all other people restless and ambitious, fond of war, and addled with the idea of conquest and military renown, no sooner asked than it was granted. Such blind and inconsiderate policy always leads to mischief.

Poulson's American Daily Advertiser
Tuesday Morning, August 18, 1818
Philadelphia

French Colony in Texas.

Pittsburg, (Penn.) August 11.

Le Champs d'Azile! how romantic, how innocent, how unsophisticated are these modern French. *Le Champs d'Azile!* The fields of Refuge, words worthy of Chateaubriand, in his happiest moments, when Atala, Chactas and the hermit, in the bosom of an American forest, breathe around the primitive characteristics of sublimity and of love.—Such is the name given by a certain French colony to a military establishment in the province of Texas, which will probably fall within our boundaries. The members of this colony made a great noise about fifteen months ago; they had, in fancy, formed a perfect Eutopia, and built their capital, which, under the influence of that kind of wild republicanism which has more than once disfigured France, they called Demopolis. Their plan was most fascinating; their constitution most liberal, and their colony was to surpass every thing that has been thought of since the days of Plato, the systems of Sir Thomas Moore, the Reverend Fenelon; and the eccentric Lee inclusive. The vine, the fig tree, and the olive, were to bloom beside the orange, and the laughing scenes of the vintage were to be translated from the fields of Languedoc to the plains of Alabama. These delusive dreams have vanished, and our Arcadian colony has suddenly been metamorphosed into a band of land-jobbers. We regret that Congress had not made the grant a conditional one. For our part, we have never entertained much confidence in these associations, where general officers and men of science are the pioneers. Government ought to encourage the emigration of this last class as much as possible; but we doubt whether giving them wild lands be the proper plan. We should prefer offering this kind of property to the laboring classes of Irish and Germans who may emigrate to our shores. This population would suit our frontiers much better than the cohorts and military establishments of Messrs. L'Allemand & Co. This colony since their arrival in Texas, have published a kind of constitution, or expose of their system of government. Among other things they promise to respect religion. As to this article, we are a little sceptical. We had the honor of an acquaintance with many of these gentlemen, on their way to Orleans; and although their science, fondness for literature, and po-

lished manners left a pleasing impression on our minds, and excited, at times, all our sympathies, yet we consider it impossible, that the same persons who actually made a jest of the whole Christian system in Pittsburgh, can treat it with seriousness in the Champs d'Asile. We shall never forget these gay, singing gentry, as they danced through our country, they were all animation; but when they talk of respecting religion, the thing becomes ludicrous. Their favourite work, which some of them carried with them as Alexander did Homer, was Du Parny's Poem of "The war of the Gods;" this production, with due deference to lady Morgan, is the most abominable and horrible burlesque on the christian doctrine, that has been attempted, and could only have been published in the year 8 of the French Republic, one and indivisible, the date of all the title pages we have seen. However we wish this military colony success; but instead of cohorts and arms, we recommend to them a little common sense as the best ingredient we know of, in every institution. We also hope they will not bother their neighbors with their ventose or their pluviose, or any other new fangled doctrine, all of which we hold in mortal aversion.

Poulson's American Daily Advertiser
Tuesday Morning, November 3, 1818
Philadelphia

Military Camp near Mexico.

About seven leagues up the river Trinity, and in the vicinity of the ground chosen by Gen. Lallemand for his military camp, is a town, containing near 500 houses, occupied by Indians and Spaniards, called Trinity, distant from St. Antonio, in the province of Mexico, about 120 leagues. The number of Lallemand's followers still keeps increasing, by the addition of fugitive Frenchmen, who find an asylum in this establishment. Neither provisions, money, or arms, are said to be wanting; and the Patriot privateers, cruising in the Gulph of Mexico, deposit their surplus prize goods, the produce of the West Indies, at this spot, between whom and the new settlers the most friendly relations subsist.

[Washington Gazette.]

New Orleans is said to have increased in population full three-fourths since its annexation to the United States, and now contains forty thousand inhabitants. It is supposed that the yellow fever would not be known there under a proper system of police, which, it is probable, will be so far improved, by the next season, as greatly to contribute towards its extinction.

[Ibid.]

Photos from the New Orleans meeting
Courtesy of Jean Epperson.



(L) Diane Burkett, direct descendent of Pierre Laffite,
and Betje Klier

CALENDAR

General meetings of The Laffite Society are held on the third Tuesday of each month at 6:00 p.m. at the first floor of the Trolley Stop Building (on the south side of the 2000 block of The strand, Galveston, Texas, 77550. Many of the meetings feature interesting and informative presentations by members 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 is announced ahead of time.

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 in the past include: an excursion to Grande Terre, Louisiana (Laffite's "Barataria"), the address of the Society's then-President, R. Dale Olson, to the Louisiana Historical Society at the New Orleans Country Club, and a summer archaeological excavation at the supposed site of Laffite's Maison Rouge.

Inquiries about upcoming special events may be directed to The Laffite Society, P.O. Box 1325, Galveston, Tx., 77553, or consult the webpage at: thelaffitesociety.com and the newsgroup at, laffite@yahoogroups.com. The Laffite Society attempts to mail information (snail mail or email) to members and interested parties on the Society's mailing list as special event details are determined.

The Laffite Society Chronicles are published two times per year—in the spring and fall. The publication schedule is not always kept precisely.

Bulletin Board

Members Warren and Varonica Stauffer from Bourne, MA. will attend the December meeting of the Laffite Society. They have contributed items of interest to the society for several years. We look forward to their visit.

Correction: The last issue (February 2006), p. 20 contained an error. Four lines were omitted from the top of the page. Those lines are:

The following letters were used by the 1850 French writers:

The letter d ends with a curved upstroke.

When there is a double s the first s looks similar to an f.

The letter p ends with a down stroke.

New Members

Ondree (Odinot) Kuhn
Pearland, Texas
okun@pdq.net

THE LAFFITE SOCIETY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
AUGUST 2006-JULY 2008

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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