



The Laffite Society Chronicles

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Editor's Page

Don C. Marler

Another new book on the Laffites is coming into publication in the immediate future. It would be interesting to know if the activities of the Laffite Society have spurred the rash of new publications over the past few years. Apparently we cannot claim any credit for this one as the author never had any contact with us or knowledge of us until his book was at the publishers. Member, Pam Keyes, has reviewed in this issue Winston Groom's *Patriotic Fire, Andrew Jackson and Jean Laffite at the Battle of New Orleans*. Check it out.

William Davis' book *The Pirates Laffite, the Treacherous World of the Corsairs of the Gulf* is coming out in paperback soon.

We have an interesting line up of articles in this issue. Reginald Wilson has produced a pretty strong case for who wrote the Journal of Jean Laffite. You may wish to review his article published last Fall on *when the Journal*

was written before reading his interesting piece on *who wrote the Journal*. The two go together. He says this is his swan song--we'll see. Once one has the Laffite itch it is hard to stop scratching.

We have a new writer this time. Cynthia LeJeune Nobles has written a comprehensive report on the Jean Laffite that I believe will serve well as an introductory article for new members and the casual reader. It is our lead article. We look forward to hearing more from her. She is moving from New Orleans to Baton Rouge soon and will be going to New York to study with prominent historians. Welcome Cindy!

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The Rise of Jean Laffite and his Role in the Battle of New Orleans

Cynthia LeJeune Nobles

Editor's note: This piece was written as a college class paper. As a rather comprehensive overview of the Laffite story it should serve well as an introduction for new members and those who seek an overview.

Mrs. Nobles is a finalist for the Gilder Lehrman Foundation Scholars Program and is being sent to New York for a week of study under some of the country's leading historians. She hopes to discuss Laffite with some of them. We wish her well.

On the morning of September 3, 1814 the British warship *Sophie*¹ volleyed a cannonball towards a sloop headed for a pass that separated Grand Terre from Grand Isle, the two islands the border between Louisiana and the Gulf of Mexico, and the base of the South's largest smuggling operation. To the north sprawled a bay that connected to the largely uninhabitable Barataria Swamp. Untouched by law, the maze of bayous, islets and muck stretched seventy miles all the way up to New Orleans. It was the kingdom of Jean Laffite, the infamous French pirate and undisputed leader of the Baratarian underworld,² and an ambivalent American the British hoped to entice to their side.

The British artillery forced the sloop aground. The *Sophie* then dropped anchor and launched a dinghy that waved a white flag. The War of 1812 was in full swing. Earlier in 1814, England, along with its coalition, had exiled Napoleon to Elba. In August the same year the English had captured and burned Washington D.C. Now the most powerful militia in the world planned to occupy New Orleans, then ascend the Mississippi River, make junction with their 10,000 troops in Canada, and choke what was left of the United States.³ It was a goal few doubted unattainable. But here on their

southern campaign the British were hampered by an ignorance of Louisiana's terrain, and were anxious to meet the man who knew the area better than anyone else.

At the time it was known that Laffite laundered goods headed for New Orleans, the principal port where Gulf privateers could safely dispose of prizes and sneak cargoes into the United States without clearing customs.⁴ It was also known that Laffite was politically well-connected, disciplined and literate, speaking English, Spanish and perhaps Italian, and was most comfortable in Bordelaise, a regional patois French. More important, he had done what no one had so successfully done before – he organized the Gulf of Mexico smuggler captains into an efficient conglomeration. The laborers who worked on and guarded the ships were called "Baratarians". These rough dockhands were a hodgepodge of sailors, bored farm hands and misfits from the armies, prisons and slave pens of France, Spain, Mexico, Italy and the newly freed Island of Haiti. Like the man they called 'bos,' they were technically American, yet mostly identified with France, and swore loyalty to no one country.

Aside from his reputation, though, who was this master of organization, the

corsair who regularly snubbed his nose at the United States Navy and customs and revenue authorities and, in reality, controlled a large chunk of the Gulf's maritime commerce? Was Jean Laffite a bloodthirsty pirate? Legitimate privateer? Modern-day Robin Hood, or combination of all?

Not only was Jean Laffite a mystery to the British, but in New Orleans, where he was widely known, little documentation existed proving his identity. Since he spent adulthood skirting the law, it was advantageous not to own a birth certificate or any record that would threaten his fluid allegiances. Most likely, however, he and his business partner and older brother (or maybe half-brother)⁵ Pierre were born in Bordeaux, France, as sons of a merchant. In the late 1700s the brothers immigrated to the Caribbean island of San Dominique, then migrated as refugees to New Orleans. Although there is evidence that Pierre immigrated to Louisiana earlier, Jean Laffite's first recorded appearance is in an 1809 letter written by Esau Glasscock who had spotted the twenty-nine-year-old Jean playing cards at a New Orleans ballroom, and described him as "...tall, with pale skin, and he has large dark eyes. He is clean-shaven except for a beard extending part-way down his cheeks."⁶ At the time of this sighting Jean and Pierre had already been fine-tuning their merchandising skills by wholesaling from warehouses on Royal Street. Their goods, including illegal slaves from Africa, came from privateers who the brothers eventually muscled into selling to them exclusively. Although such a coup would suggest cunning and force, the New Orleans historian Charles Gayarre gives benevolent clues to Jean and Pierre's personalities by writing that they "...were men of limited education, but intelligent, active; their manners were cordial and winning—of a sympathetic nature, bold and capable of creating an almost irresistible influence over congenial spirits."⁷

By 1810 the Laffites had a monopoly on local contraband. Virtually everything smuggled in and out of New Orleans first passed through them. Later that

year, their enterprise suffered a setback when the fall of the Republic of West Florida cut off a much-used smuggling route, but the formation of the dubious South American country of Cartagena opened another when it issued letters of marque to privateers to prey upon the ships of Spain, the one country the United States considered neutral. Privateers were owners of ships who secured commissions to capture ships from a country's enemy. Privateering was legal, but always stipulated that the privateer and issuing country share in the booty. However, with few controls and the port of Cartagena rarely visited, these South American commissions were largely considered licenses for outright piracy.

Jean was now Grand Terre's undisputed king, and Pierre, that year physically hampered by a stroke, remained a go-between in New Orleans. There the new government was increasingly dismayed by illegal and provocative activities taking place off the coast, but since Governor Claiborne was hesitant to upset the planters and bargain-hungry French, he moved with caution to stop the smuggling.⁸

The vocal Gallic majority had evolved from the legendary French prisoners, homeless people, destitute children and unguarded girls⁹ who originally settled New Orleans, and had long ago mingled with Indians, Germans and the few Spanish who had ventured in during Spain's colonial rule. French nationalism had been bolstered when, in the late 1700s, French, free black and slave refugees (likely including the Laffites) had escaped to New Orleans from the Saint Dominique slave riots, and were followed by Frenchmen evicted by Spain from Cuba. Besides the heavy Latin/French population, New Orleans also boasted the largest free black community in North America, even larger than New York.¹⁰ These *gens de couleur libres*, free people of color, owned property and slaves, and worked as merchants, artists and planters. Although relegated to a lower social caste, they did mix well culturally with the French-speaking whites, as well as with Indians and slaves, and together with the latter formed two-

thirds of the population and spoke variants of the white man's French.

In this era of rapid change, slaves, freedmen and whites were not allowed to intermarry, but it was common for white men to take mixed-race mistresses, one of many practices that appalled the English-speaking Americans. Jean Laffite, for at least a time, took such a companion, Catherine Villars¹¹, a quadroon and the sister of Pierre's mistress Marie. Jean spent most of his time on Grand Terre, but he did make sporadic visits to Catherine. Historian Lyle Saxon claims that Laffite and Catherine had a son, Jean Pierre, who was baptized by Father Antonio de Sedella, or "Pere Antone" at the Church of Saint Louis in New Orleans.¹² Despite this claim, however, whether or not Jean had children is still a matter of controversy.

Unlike representatives of the new American government, the morals and living standards of New Orleans' overwhelmingly Catholic population were laissez-faire at best. The locals' favorite pastimes were gambling and drinking. Sailors and laborers wandered the levees all hours of the night. It was the tail end of the so-called "Golden Age" of piracy, yet known pirates freely roamed, and were not only tolerated but even admired.¹³ Residents fancied themselves as sophisticated as Parisians, but were in fact grossly undereducated and lived in wooden, crowded houses that lined muddy, filth-strewn streets. John Pintard, a visiting New York merchant did, however, make a backhanded compliment to the cuisine by saying that "...all luxury [is] confined to what is put on the table to be eaten, and here profusion abounds."¹⁴

Not surprisingly, corruption was widespread. In 1790 a Frenchman named du Breuil noted that all contracts in New Orleans were made "under the chimney,"¹⁵ dishonesty having been practically elevated to an art form, in no small part due to the generations of smugglers that had thrived under Spanish rule.

On top of the lax culture, unfavorable commerce laws and resulting shortages made the locals stubbornly refuse to give up their practice of buying contraband goods cheaply. Cotton and sugar were creating unknown wealth, and with the booming economy, city dwellers increasingly sought imported wares. More exorbitant luxury was found on the surrounding plantations where moneyed gentry insisted on fine imported furniture, spices and fabrics. These commodities came in through the Caribbean then to New Orleans, an important port city that, until 1825, enjoyed a monopoly of trade between the Northeast and the Middle West.¹⁶ This brisk exchange was crucial to an economy that was based virtually on agriculture, and had little or no hard industry to produce sought-after goods.

Legal commerce had also been stifled when Jefferson responded to British and French shipping restrictions by enacting the 1806 Non-importation Act. A year later the act was suspended, but the bolder Embargo Act forbid all international trade and virtually closed all lawful commerce with other nations and opened the door to privateers and smugglers.¹⁷ In 1809 Congress repealed the Embargo Act and passed the Non-intercourse Act, opening trade to all nations except Britain and France. Although the experiments ended in 1810, the Embargo, Non-importation and Non-intercourse acts helped pave a shadowy avenue for bargains. It was an avenue that led to and from Grand Terre, and one New Orleans residents didn't want to abandon.

Aside from scarce merchandise, most of the population, both white and freedmen, also demanded slaves. In 1808 congress ratified a law that banned the importation of slaves born outside the United States, a ruling that was catastrophic for plantation owners, most of whom didn't blink at the prospect of illegally buying field hands from Laffite's *barracoons*, slave pens, on Grand Terre for \$150 to \$200 each, whereas in the city legal slaves cost up to \$700.¹⁸

Other impediments to legal commerce included customs duties, tariffs and taxes, and since Jean Laffite didn't pay any of it, he undercut any legitimate market. His overhead only included sharing half the profits with Gulf privateers.

When war broke out with England, the U. S. Navy consisted of just twenty-two vessels. Desperate to defend its waters, the United States gave letters of marque to 526 privateers.¹⁹ By the end of the War of 1812 the Navy had captured only 254 enemy ships, while privateers had captured 1,300.²⁰

Careful to grant commissions to only reputable owners and captains, only six were issued in New Orleans.²¹ Tainted reputations and a desire to retain all captured prizes kept Jean and Pierre, and most of the privateers, away from American certification. One coveted American letter of marque did go to a member of Laffite's organization, Stephen Debon who owned the *Spy*. Renato Beluche was master of the *Spy*,²² and was the son of a plantation family, and who regularly unloaded on Grand Terre. Of the numerous captains choosing Grand Terre over lawful enterprise, other notables were the Italians Vincent Gambi and Louis "Nez Coupe" (lost nose) Chighizola. Dominique You, an expert artilleryman and hardened veteran from Napoleon's army, sailed under the Bolivian flag. You also held a commission from Cartagena, and was reportedly one of Jean's favorites.²³

Jean and Pierre themselves owned ships with names like the *Dorada* and the *Petit Milan*, and like every other captain docking on Grand Terre, proclaimed themselves legal privateers. Some privateer prizes did actually make it through United States Customs in New Orleans, but the majority was unloaded on the inner coast of Grand Terre at the spot where old maps of Louisiana show "Smuggler's Anchorage."²⁴ There Laffite provided secure harborage, then assured efficient distributions for booty²⁵ by barge and pirogue to dozens of auction sites like the shell island called "The Temple," and at Cat Island, Grand Terre, and at warehouses in New

Orleans, all locations that were visited regularly by supposed law-abiding citizens.

With the reluctant Americans regularly blurring the line between legal and illegal, Louisiana's first Protestant, English-speaking governor, William C.C. Claiborne, found himself continually failing to bring order to the area. He wrote to President Madison: "Sir, the more I become acquainted with the inhabitants of this Province, the more I am convinced of their unfitness for representative Government...[due to] the machinations of the few base individuals."²⁶ One of those "base individuals", no doubt, was Jean Laffite, a widely-accepted smuggler who was handsome, witty, well-spoken and, above all, French.

Claiborne may have expressed frustration with corruption, but when it came to action he tread lightly around local heroes. Certainly the Laffites were Frenchmen first, but since loyalties could go to the highest bidder, the privateers and smugglers could seriously compromise the security of New Orleans and south Louisiana.²⁷ Add that to New Orleans' isolation from the rest of the country and the Creole ingrained hatred of their new government, and the political climate for Claiborne was, at best, ticklish, a quandary heightened by England's propaganda telling residents that a British victory would return the region to Spain.²⁸

When war was officially declared, the government realized they'd have to crack down; illegal merchandise meant no revenue, money desperately needed for defense. On November 10, 1812, John R. Grymes, United States district attorney, charged Jean Laffite with violating the revenue law. Six days later Andrew Holmes and the 24th U.S. Infantry surprised Jean and Pierre smuggling in contraband, and peacefully hauled them in to the customs' officials in New Orleans. On November 19, the Laffites were formally charged, paid their bond, but then promptly forfeited and returned to smuggling, their daring winked at by

friends who held powerful seats in government.²⁹

Laffite's audacity grew, so much so that, even while still under indictment, he submitted an unsigned request for a letter of marque from the French consul at New Orleans for his Brig *Diligente*. He listed his age as 32, his name as ship's captain of a crew of ninety-one, and his birthplace as Bordeaux. On March 2, 1813 the registration certificate was granted³⁰, but he never did follow through with the process.

Although tales of brutality followed the exploits of the privateers, many stories circulated that Jean Laffite usually treated his captives and slaves, as well as strangers, humanely, and at times was even generous and hospitable. Gayarre, known for expressing the popular view of French New Orleans, agreed and wrote:

I cannot but think that they were mere smugglers, eager for ill-gotten lucre, it is true, but averse to shedding blood, which they always did reluctantly in those armed collisions to which they were sometimes exposed. Indeed, it was manifestly their interest to abstain from deeds of atrocity, which would have been fatal to the success of the illegal pursuits...³¹

One example of Jean's softer side is shown when plantation owner Thomas Martin was stranded on an uninhabited island after a Gulf storm, and two days later was taken aboard a ship by its captain who fed him and his shipmates and gave them sherry. The men spent the night onboard, and the next day the captain sailed them to safety. That day Martin found out that the helpful stranger was the notorious Jean Laffite, a host who'd been anything but fearsome. Some time later, in the middle of the night, Laffite knocked on the Martins' door and asked Thomas Martin to deliver a letter to a contact in Donaldsonville. Although it is

speculated that Martin may have helped Laffite turn himself in to Governor Claiborne and Andrew Jackson some time before the Battle of New Orleans, the details of the appeal are unknown, but it is acknowledged that Thomas Martin was more than happy to oblige Laffite's request.³²

But as plundering off the coast became more aggressive and Laffite threatened to monopolize the city's import trade, complaints grew loud, no matter how gentlemanly his reputation. The merchants Laffite undercut were especially vocal. Also, Pierre was wanted by creditors, and many had not forgotten an 1811 slave revolt that, though impossible to tie to Laffite, was attributed to illegal San Domingue slaves that Laffite was known for smuggling.³³

Niles' Weekly Register reports that on March 15, 1813 Governor Claiborne issued a proclamation denouncing the "banditti" who "commit depredations and piracies against the vessels of nations at peace [Spain] with the United States," and on April 7, the government filed cases against Jean and Pierre.³⁴ On October 14 customs officials again surprised Laffite's smugglers in the act, but this time gunfire left William Randall, a government volunteer, with a bullet in his thigh. True to his nature, Jean Laffite hauled off the goods he'd been defending, then left to find a doctor for the wounded man.³⁵

Pushed to the limit, on November 24 Claiborne issued a five hundred dollar reward for Laffite. Laffite, in turn and true to style, replied by printing flyers that offered a one thousand dollar reward for Claiborne. In January Laffite was unfazed and yet uncaptured, and held a massive slave auction at the Temple. At the sale, an American revenue officer, John Stout, was killed. Six months later, on the pretext of an outstanding creditor judgment, Pierre was ambushed during one of his frequent trips to New Orleans, and arrested and jailed in the Cabildo.³⁶

Laffite immediately began thinking up ways to free his brother, and, like any good politician, hoped to sway public

opinion to his side by using the press. On August 18, a local English-language newspaper published an anonymous letter signed by "Napoleon, Junior," warning that if Pierre were convicted and Barataria dismantled, then everyone would be poorer.³⁷ But, despite the propaganda, attitudes were changing, and even the strongest supporters of Barataria could do little to bring Laffite aid.³⁸

Laffite's enterprise was at a desperate turning point. The September morning when the *Sophie* and its British Captain Lockyer appeared, Pierre was still in prison and Laffite's contacts had earlier informed him that the federal Commodore Daniel Patterson was planning to wipe out Grand Terre. For four years Laffite had been the *bos* of Grand Terre and subversive toast of the city, but he was sinking fast in a quicksand of turmoil caused by political change, cultural differences, mixed allegiances and war. But at this moment he had to deal with the *HMS Sophie*, and before the smoke from the battleship cleared, five Baratarians in a skiff met the British dinghy halfway. Captain Lockyer asked for Laffite, and was told that he was on the island. Lockyer then made his first mistake and willingly followed the skiff onto shore where he learned that one of the Baratarians in the skiff had indeed been Laffite.³⁹

Trapped, Lockyer faced over two hundred hostile Baratarians. Laffite called off his men as best he could. A dead captain would only provoke England into battle, a skirmish he knew he couldn't win. Laffite must show courtesy to Captain Lockyer, or at least keep him alive, a feat that would not be easy if the Baratarians dragged the enemy "sp[ies]"⁴⁰ upriver into the fearful and passionate City of New Orleans. Besides that, there was a chance the meeting might be mutually beneficial. Not only did the Americans have Pierre, but deep down inside Laffite likely wanted America to win the war. Although Laffite was probably planning to relocate to the Mexican Coast, his fortunes would benefit if the war's victor was the slave-owning country of America and not the

abolitionist British. Now he needed to convince Claiborne he was on his side, and what better way to prove allegiance than to hand over British secrets.⁴¹

Laffite politely listened while Lockyer revealed five documents: One, dated August 13, was from Lt. Col. Edward Nicholls asking Laffite and the Baratarians to join with England.⁴² Another, dated August 30 from King George III's forces, ordered Lockyer to contact Laffite and the Baratarians and offer the status of British subjects, as well as land that would not be reverted to Spain.⁴³

A third document was from Captain William Henry Percy to Nicolas Lockyer commanding him to find out the status of missing British merchantmen and, if he didn't receive cooperation, to destroy Barataria.⁴⁴ Also enclosed was a proclamation to "Natives of Louisiana" by Lieutenant Colonel Edward Nicholls imploring the French residents to assist the British in "liberating from a faithless, imbecile government, your paternal soil."⁴⁵ A final letter was addressed to Jean Laffite from Nicholls offering him the British rank of Captain, along with land and property, if he and his men abandoned their piracy.⁴⁶ Today a legend circulates that \$30,000 was also part of the British bribe, but this claim has never been substantiated.

Although he considered the American government a political adversary, Laffite realized that over the years his host country could have been more heavy-handed, so he never attacked American ships and forbid his captains to do so (although rumors flew that some had broken this rule). For this reason, and because of the riches he made smuggling, the British proposition was hardly an enticement, but Laffite feigned interest and was hospitable. However, the Baratarians did otherwise, and abducted Lockyer and locked him up in their prison. The next morning Laffite managed to free Lockyer, then sent him back to his ship, and an hour later sent the British captain a letter asking for fifteen days to reply.⁴⁷

With the *Sophie* waiting offshore, Laffite dashed off the documents, along with a letter to John Blanque, a bilingual merchant, banker and legislator whom Laffite trusted to make a case to Claiborne, and attest to Laffite's loyalty and plead for Pierre's release. Before the packet made its way into Blanque's hands, Pierre magically escaped from jail, probably aided by a politician, a local merchant or pirates, and on September 7, the *Sophie* sailed away.⁴⁸

Pierre, back on Grand Terre with Jean and with a token \$1,000 reward on his head, then wrote a letter to Claiborne stating that he and Jean were "...the stray sheep, wishing to return to the sheepfold."⁴⁹ Although ambivalent, Claiborne didn't accept the olive branch and was instead swayed by Commodore Patterson and Colonel Ross, his national defense consultants, and allowed the two to attack Grand Terre.⁵⁰

On the morning of September 16th, Patterson and the *Carolina* arrived to find that Jean and Pierre had earlier escaped, probably to a nearby plantation. Twenty-seven ships were in mooring, and Dominiuge You was in command and setting fire to whatever would burn. You had probably been instructed by Laffite not to resist. Patterson soon took control, locked up the pirates, and over the next few days captured whatever sailed in. In the end, Patterson burned several privateer ships and kept eight as prizes, along with merchandise, cannon, money and incriminating evidence against supposedly respectable residents.⁵¹ No one had been killed, but Laffite's Grand Terre was destroyed. Jean and Pierre stayed at large, but You, along with over one hundred Baratarians were locked up in the Cabildo.

On December 1st, Major General Andrew Jackson arrived in New Orleans. Determined to defend the important but militarily weak South, he found himself faced with fear and apathy from a population that didn't understand a word he said. In earlier communications he had laid the groundwork for a citizen army offering \$124 and 160 acres of land, even to

freed men of color,⁵² but the attempt only attracted 287 men.⁵³ The navy only had two ships, the *Carolina* and the *Louisiana*. Laffite's ships, however, were impounded and functional, but sat idle since not nearly enough men were on hand to command them. But Jackson abhorred lawlessness. And although facing inevitable attack from the most powerful military in the world, he insisted that the able-bodied Baratarians be kept in prison, and even embellished Claiborne's term of endearment calling Laffite and his men "hellish banditti."⁵⁴

Jackson's patriotic enthusiasm was infectious. Through his interpreter Edward Livingston, an attorney and Laffite's counsel against the American government, Jackson was able to rally the locals to build up defenses. But though infused with newfound American allegiance, the citizens of New Orleans lacked everything to sustain a long battle, including men to fight and crew Patterson's two warships. American artillerists were woefully short on ammunition and gun flints, the latter essential to make what guns they did have fire.

Influential men like Major General Villere of the militia and Bernard de Marigny de Mandeville begged Jackson to enlist Laffite's help. On December 12 the British fleet was spotted heading towards Lake Borgne, and by now the General was desperate enough to relent. In mid-December Jackson and Jean Laffite met secretly. The details of that meeting have never been made public but it is said that Jackson was impressed with Laffite's enthusiasm and patriotism, so the General agreed to recommend a pardon for all Baratarians who would fight. Jackson assured Laffite he would fulfill this request,⁵⁵ and on December 19 the Louisiana Legislature unanimously passed a bill requesting the President to grant full pardons for Laffite's men.⁵⁶ Laffite, in turn, provided desperately needed artillery, powder and 7,500 flints. Along with the men from prison, as well as Baratarians hiding outside the city, the two groups totaled over 400.⁵⁷ Soon, two additional ships were fully manned and Dominique You was

captain of a militia company. Pierre remained near General Jackson as an advisor and, along with Major Michael Reynolds, Jean, presumably under some sort of executive shield, set up reinforcement down the bayous between Grand Terre and the city.

On December 23, with the Royal Navy in complete control of Louisiana's inland waterways and the city under martial law, Pierre Laffite guided General Coffee and his men to a launch position where they drove the British right flank back in this first show of fire-power. Patterson's *Carolina* and Jackson's troops surprised the British from the front in this battle the Americans won.⁵⁸ Several more skirmishes ensued, and on December 27 a British shell blew up the *Carolina*, leaving only the *Louisiana* to support Jackson from the river.⁵⁹

On December 28 in Chalmette, six miles south of New Orleans, Dominique You and Renato Beluche took command of two twenty-four pounders and a thirty-two-pounder on Battery Number 3 of Jackson's eight-battery line. The chest-high barricade of cotton bales was fronted by the fifteen-foot-wide Rodriguez canal, the rampart a mile long extending from an impassable swamp all the way to the Mississippi River. On December 29, a twenty-four pounder from one of the Baratarians ships was installed on the west bank of the river. But even with Laffite's artillery, Jackson was still short on supplies as evidenced in his January 3 letter to his headquarters stating that "Again, I must apprise you that the arms I have so long been expecting have not arrived."⁶⁰

The main battle began at dawn on January 8 at the Chalmette battlefield with Major General Sir Edward Pakenham, brother-in-law of the duke of Wellington, commanding between 11,000 and 14,450 seasoned troops, including the famed Scottish Ninety-third Highlanders. Jackson's hastily assembled line consisted of only 3,500 to 5,000, a ragtag conglomeration of United States army troops; Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana militia; free black soldiers; Choctaw

warriors; and Baratarians pirates,⁶¹ along with lawyers, politicians, doctors, carpenters and merchants, and any free man who could shoot a gun. But although the match seemed grossly unbalanced, mistakes and uncoordinated plans left the British marching precisely across open ground making them perfect targets for the grapeshot, cannon and long rifles of the American militia, squirrel hunters and pirates. Among those sharpshooters were fifty Baratarians, with Dominique and Beluche at Batteries 3 and 4, along with Gambi and Chigozola, all manning three cannon. Hardly a large contingency, the pirates were highly skilled and motivated by the promise of a pardon and their ingrained hatred of the British.

In the end, the quick, decisive American victory left two thousand British shot, killed or reported missing, while the underdog Americans lost only thirteen.⁶² The shocked British called for a halt to the battle, and after a week of sporadic firing on Fort St. Philip, the enemy withdrew through Lake Borgne, ending fighting in a war that had actually been halted by the Treaty of Ghent two weeks before January 8.

Although reports of valiant bravery followed the Baratarians' return to New Orleans after January 8, Laffite's crew probably contributed most to the American cause during the days preceding the battle when their shooting skills were invaluable in the swamps and bayous, at Fort St. John, Fort St. Phillip and on the decks of the *Louisiana*. Even Commodore Patterson, who only months earlier had destroyed Grand Terre, stated that his "...crew is composed of men of all nations, taken from the streets of New Orleans...yet I never knew guns better served..."⁶³

During the January 8th battle, Dominique, Beluche, Gambi and Chigozola were strategically placed on the right flank for maximum effect. Dominique and Gambi both received wounds. Pierre, continuing to serve as a guide and advisor to Jackson, was on the West Bank. By all accounts, Jean never saw the battlefield and was instead helping to lead defenses

somewhere between New Orleans and Grand Isle. It is reported that he may have arrived at the battlefield around noon, but by then fighting had ceased. But he had earlier provided men and vital guns, powder and flint to the Americans, and for these conciliatory actions was welcomed as a hero.

Accolades poured in, especially to Dominique and Beluche, the two gallant cannoner. Although they had become patriots for a price, Jean and Pierre again openly walked New Orleans's streets, and even attended formal celebrations. More significantly, Jackson sent a request for clemency to Washington, and on February 6, President Madison declared that Jean Laffite and the Baratarians be granted a "free and full pardon of all offenses committed in violation for any act or acts of congress of the said United States."⁶⁴ But even though the government now welcomed back the "stray sheep," America refused to return Laffite's captured ships and merchandise, and even a personal visit and formal petition to President Monroe met with no success.⁶⁵

Clemency wasn't enough to ground Laffite. Not one to be tied to rules, Laffite, with Pierre, in 1816 began to spy for Spain, started up a smuggling operation in Galveston, and again traded in illegal slaves. Unable to live life any way but on the edge, Jean Laffite reportedly died violently in a Gulf sea battle in the early months of 1823.⁶⁶

Laffite's years in New Orleans read more like a Hollywood movie script than a biography, his rock-star aura is

still the subject of numerous legends. But it is a fact that Laffite was an entrepreneur, a sophisticated merchant with a silver tongue and tarnished morals, his ethics particularly challenged when it came to slavery, a barbaric practice America was trying to phase out, but one he underhandedly promoted for profit. And on the issue of his questionable patriotism, the question must be asked: Suppose Jean Laffite had agreed to side with the British? What if he had sneaked the crown's warships up the backwaters to New Orleans and turned loose against Jackson the hundreds of still-free Baratarians, those "hellish banditti" who were experts at guerilla warfare and knew the layout of the city as well as anyone? Suspect patriot, privateer, villain or not, it must be considered that Laffite's crucial decision to fight with America may have saved the city from British invasion, the potential victory one that would have surely tested the wording of the Treaty of Ghent, an accord that that wasn't ratified until February 17.

Besides possible savior, in the broad sense of the word he could also be labeled a pirate, (although he had never been indicted as such) and not a privateer, since, especially in Galveston, he harbored and traded with known sea raiders. Beyond that, he was the product of a culture that for years had accepted smuggling, a region with a chaotic history that was a jumble of forced adjustments to variant political structures, ethnicities and languages that combined to produce the likes of Jean Laffite, an anomaly who could have only thrived in his place and time.

Endnotes

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3. DeGrummond, *The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans*, 31.
4. Vogel, *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, 2.

- 5 Davis, William C., *The Pirates Laffite*, (New York: Harcourt, 2005), 2. (William Davis is virtually the only historian who says they were half brothers. He may be right, but his theory has not yet been tested).
- 6 Saxon, Lyle, *Lafitte the Pirate*, (New York: The Century Co., 1930) 11.
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- 8 Ramsay, Jack, Jr., *Jean Laffite*, (Austin, Texas, Eakin Press, 1996), 32.
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- 10 Starr, Frederick, *New Orleans Unmasked*, (Dedaux Publishing, New Orleans, 1983) 127.
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- 19 Marler, Don, *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, Galveston, Vol. VI, No. 1, February, 2000, p. 6.
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- 26 Starr, *New Orleans Unmasked*, 192.
- 27 Davis, *The Pirates Laffite*, 111.
- 28 Notice from Thomas L. Butler, 7th Military District Headquarters, "To the citizens of New Orleans" (New Orleans: La. Historical Collection; clipping from handbill or newspaper), 49-12-L.
- 29 Ramsay, *Laffite the Pirate*, 37.
- 30 Port documents describing Jean and Pierre Lafitte's Privateer Brig *Diligente*, 1813, printed document with handwritten entries (New Orleans: Williams Research Center: New Orleans), MSS 56, folder 3.
- 31 Louisiana State Museum, *The Story of Jean and Pierre Lafitte*, 74.
- 32 Interview with John F. Wettermark, great-great-great grandson of Thomas Martin, June 10, 2005. Accounts of shipwreck chronicled in Ramsay's *Laffite*, p. vii, and agree with Wettermark who states that Martin's wife Martha and daughter Eliza were on the ship rescued by Laffite. The "Martin Family Memoirs" in the Melrose Collection at Northwestern State University Library, Natchitoches, Louisiana disagree with this account. Memoirs put date of shipwreck on December 28, 1813.
- 33 Davis, *The Pirates Laffite*, 73.
- 34 Ramsay, *Jean Laffite*, 40.
- 35 Davis, *The Pirates Laffite*, 120-121.
- 36 *Ibid*, 158.
- 37 *Ibid*, 162-164.
- 38 Ramsay, *Jean Laffite*, 46.
- 39 DeGrummond, *The Baratarians and The Battle of New Orleans*, 37.
- 40 *Ibid*, 38.
- 41 Davis, *The Pirates Laffite*, 173.
- 42 Capt. William Henry Percy Letter to Jean Lafitte, Barataria, Louisiana, September 1, 1814, (New Orleans: Williams Research Center), manuscript copy, MSS 196, folder 4.
- 43 Ramsay, *Jean Laffite*, 49.

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- 44 Capt. William Henry Percy, *HMS Hermes*, Pensacola, Letter to Nicholas Lockyer, HM Sloop *Sophie*, August 30, 1814, (New Orleans: Historic New Orleans Collection), manuscript copy, MSS 196, folder 3.
- 45 Proclamation to "Natives of Louisiana" by Lieutenant Colonel Edward Nicholls, Commanding His Britannic Majesty's Forces in the Floridas, August 29, 1814, (New Orleans: Historic New Orleans Collection), manuscript copy, MSS 196, folder 2.
- 46 Davis, *The Pirates Laffite*, 168.
- 47 [Jean] Lafitte, Baratavia, to Captain [Nicholas] Lockyer, September 4, 1814, (New Orleans: Clarisse Claiborne Grima Fund purchase, Historic New Orleans Collection), MSS 555, folder 37.
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- 62 Historic New Orleans Collection short film, "The Terrible and the Brave: The Battles for New Orleans, 1814-15."
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Spice Smuggling in Barataria

Pam Keyes

In the early 1800s, Baratarian smugglers were willing to kill to keep robbers from seizing bales of cinnamon bark because spices like that from the far east were as valuable then as gold doubloons.

Cinnamon bales worth close to \$3,000 in 1812 dollars constituted the main haul of the first successful raid by revenue agents against the Laffites, in November 1812. By way of comparison, those 26 confiscated bales would be worth over \$42,000 in modern dollars. Spices were a deadly serious cash crop in the Laffites' era, sort of on the equivalent of marijuana now.

Details about the cinnamon trafficking raid, which happened to net one of the very first of the Laffite brothers' big-time smuggling ventures, is found in Case 573 of the Eastern District of Louisiana court archives, now at Fort Worth.

Acting on a tip, Capt. Andrew Hunter Holmes and some 40 US dragoons and revenue agents laid in wait in boats for smugglers one moonlit night near the Temple at Lake Barataria, along a popular route to access plantations above New Orleans. Soon they spotted a group of three or four sails billowing on the lake and immediately took off in pursuit in their unmarked boats bearing no flags. In his later court testimony, Holmes said he came within hailing distance (around 80 yards away) and identified his detachment as United States troops. He received a threatening response from the Baratarians that if the revenue agents came closer they would fire into them and kill them every one "which were the words used in broken English." Seeing they were very close to shore, Holmes ordered all his boats to land, except for one that was ordered to intercept the flight of the smugglers' group. Even while the

trap was closing in upon the Baratarians, Holmes said the smugglers were still menacing Holmes and his men with "instant death" if they left their boats. Although some of the Baratarians fled to the marsh, the largest party disembarked on shore and surrendered with great reluctance. During this, one boatload of Baratarians attempted to escape, but after one of Holmes' men fired into it and killed a man. The rest surrendered and were taken prisoner along with the main party.

The contents of the smugglers' boats were 26 bales of cinnamon (termed a large quantity by Holmes); 54 linen shirts; three pieces of Russia sheeting; seven pieces of canvas, one bundle of twine and a handkerchief. This merchandise was from a ship Holmes claimed had "discharged her cargo before she had arrived at the proper place." Jean Laffite told Holmes that the goods came off an unnamed privateer of "considerable force" which was then at Grand Isle. This smuggling venture seems to have been the first significant one for the Laffite brothers and the Baratarians. Once back in New Orleans the prisoners were released and not immediately charged. The cinnamon and other valuable goods were ordered sold with the money split between the captors and the United States, even though the proper Spanish owners made claim to the lot. So Holmes and his men benefited the most from the Laffites' first big smuggling endeavor.

The extent to which the Baratarians were prepared to protect their cargo from robbery could have been deadly. Although one of the men accidentally tossed his musket overboard, in the Baratarian boats Holmes' men found two swords "very sharply ground, three fusels charged and cocked, a dagger or cut and thrust, and a knife intended to

be used as a dirk." All to protect a big bundle of cinnamon!

In his later petition for the United States of America, John Grymes, district attorney, asked that Pierre Laffite be found indebted to the US in the sum of \$12,014.52 for customs duty violations, triple the total amount of the smuggled merchandise.

The cinnamon incident seems to have left a bitter taste in the Laffites' mouths, for afterward their smuggling did not concentrate on spice trade items. Instead, they focused on the more marketable (and profitable) slaves from captured Spanish ships.

In the Laffites' time, cinnamon came from British-controlled Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), and the British maintained such tight reins on the supply of the exotic spice that oftentimes they demanded (and got) 500 times the source price of the spice in export tax. The bales of cinnamon in the Baratarians' boats were made up of quills of the cinnamon tree bark, carefully peeled and rolled up in lengths to be stacked together much like cordwood. A quantity of these bales would have scented the air heavily with a sweet and redolent perfume, so much so that the revenue agents likely could have traced the smugglers' boats through the bayous by scent alone! (Interestingly, the very word *aroma* derives from the Greek word for spice.)

The meals at Grand Terre probably benefited from the privateersmen's

access to spice-laden Spanish ships. In addition to its use in cooking to enhance and flavor foods, cinnamon also was used medicinally, as a blood purifier, infection prevention (weak antibiotic), and as a digestive aid (when made into a tonic). Its aromatic smell also was incorporated as a primitive deodorant.

Cinnamon has a fascinating history: The discovery for trading centers for it and such spices as pepper, cloves and nutmeg were the main motivators behind world exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries. Spices were used as a means of exchange between countries, in the same way as gold and silver. Spices could be used to buy land, pay fines, and to buy houses. Eventually, coffee, tea, chocolate and sugar dethroned cinnamon and other spices from their domination as trade goods in world markets. At one time in the early 1800s, import duties on spices were enough to pay 5 per cent of the expenses of the entire US government.

So the next time you enjoy a cinnamon roll for breakfast, you might pause to reflect on how once only the wealthiest Americans were able to use that spice. Today, however, the United States is the world's largest importer and consumer of spices used to season food products. The price of spices from the far east has dramatically declined from the Laffites' time, even though the best cinnamon still comes from Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where it is still prepared in the exact same way as in the early 1800s.

Who Wrote the Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story

Part A

Reginald Wilson

The Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center at Liberty, Texas, has been the depository for the Laffite Collection since 1976, after it had been previously owned by several individuals. This collection consists of several family Bibles, pictures, copybooks, and The Journal, supposedly written by Jean Laffite between 1845 and 1850. For the past 50 years there has been a question whether or not Jean Laffite was the person who wrote the Journal.

In 2004, William Davis found an original letter in the Edward Livingston archives written by Jean Laffite dated October 4, 1814.¹ This was after the September 16th raid on Grande Terre by Commodore Patterson, when the Laffite brothers were hiding out at one of the LaBranche brother's plantations. Jean had no secretary there to write for him so the letter was written by Jean Laffite. This handwriting is *completely* different from the handwriting in the Journal.

In an effort to authenticate the Journal, John Howell, in 1974, obtained the services of Ralph O. Queen.² Mr. Queen had over 40 years experience in criminal investigation of handwriting identification for the Houston Police Department, the State of Texas, and the Federal Government. Mr. Queen is a member of the international Association for Identification, whose membership is limited to persons with extensive legal experience in detection of forgeries. Mr. Queen has been the only qualified handwriting expert to examine the Journal and compare the handwriting with other specimens presumed to be in Jean Laffite's handwriting: the two letters written to General Long and signed by Jean Laffite, Galveston, dated July 7, 1819, and September 30, 1819, and the LeBrave ship's document from 1819. The last sentence of this document states: "Executed in duplicate

and in good faith at Galveston this 18th of August, 1819" and signed Jn Laffite.

Mr. Queen reported in a letter on September 27, 1974, that after a detailed study had been made of the Laffite documents with the pages from the Journal, he considered the handwriting to be the same. He said "It is my opinion that the author of the known writings was also the author of the writings appearing on the pages of the Journal."

Unfortunately, unknown to those concerned, the Long letters and the LeBrave document have later proven in comparison to the October 4, 1814 letter to not be in the handwriting of the real Jean Laffite. It is important to recognize that whoever wrote the three documents on Galveston in 1819 *lived long enough to have written the Journal in the 1850s.*

If Jean Laffite didn't write the Journal, then who did?

There is strong evidence that Jean Laffite was killed in a sea battle in February 1823 off the coast of Honduras.³ The most likely person to have written the Journal would have been a family member, friend, associate, or secretary. Two associates that can be eliminated immediately would be Lafon, who died in 1823, and Latour who died in 1897. I cannot think of any other associate that would know enough about Laffite and his family to be able to write the Journal. No secretary has been found who was with Laffite long enough to learn about the family and other facts written in the Journal. Pierre died in 1821, therefore, he could not have written it. In Pierre's family only Eugene might have written the Journal but his handwriting is completely different from that of the Journal.

Did Jean Laffite have a family and descendants?

It is documented that Jean had a son, Jean Pierre, by Catherine Villiard. However, this son died in October 1832 during an epidemic.⁴ Did Jean marry Christian Lavine and have children by her? It is only in the Journal that this marriage to Christina is mentioned. They were both about 19-20 years old and they had three children: Antoine, Lucien and Denise Jeanette.⁵ No documentary proof such as a marriage certificate, birth certificates, baptismal records, or death certificates have been found for these three children or for five grandchildren. It is only found in the Journal that Denise married Francis Little and had five children: Sylvester, Jesse, Francis, Eunice and Lois Ann. There is no proof anywhere that this happened. At the same time there is no proof that it did not happen. These descendants are mentioned numerous times in the Journal and all of them wrote in the "copy books"⁶ along with many unknown persons. Francis Little and his brother, John, had a furniture manufacturing facility in St. Louis. This statement is made in the Journal and in several St. Louis city directories; in the 1850s their advertisement is found. Also in the 1857 City Directory an advertisement is found for Jesse Little as a cabinet maker, located at 71 North 3rd, residence, the City Hotel. Was this Jesse the son of Francis Little? The best proof may be that John A. (aka John Matejka) claimed to have personally known Lois Ann Little. He stated in two separate letters to Audrey Lloyd that he had visited her many times. The timeline is correct as John A. said he was ten years old and Lois Ann was in her sixties when they first met.

Was John A. truthful when he said he knew Lois Ann? If so, then there was also a Jean Antoine born on January 4, 1801, in Port-au-Prince, St. Dominique. The Journal states: "My daughter Denise Jeanette was born on August 2, 1804, on board the vessel of my brother. My wife died while giving birth to Denise Jeanette on the vessel near Grand Terre, the same day as the birth."⁷ Nothing is known about the upbringing of the

three children until they were older teenagers.

The Journal states: "my son, Lucien, was a student for a short time at the University of St. Louis when it became a school on Second and Market Streets in the E. Alvarez Building. He was studying history and languages."⁸ Where was Antoine? Why did not Laffite send Antoine for more education. The two boys were always together. I soon found the answer. "In my correspondence with George Graham, I told him my son, Antoine, was coming to help me."⁹ Antoine did not attend the University because he was on Galveston with his father. My research of handwriting proves that it was Antoine, on Galveston, that wrote the two Long letters and the LeBrave document. These were written between July 7, 1819 and September 30, 1819.

There had been several secretaries on Galveston, Joa de laPorta was already on Galveston when Jean Laffite arrived. He left in the middle of 1818 to go to New Orleans for treatment of a skin disease. Samples of his handwriting show that his penmanship was completely different from that of the Journal. He was living in New Orleans in 1835. Raymond Espagnol was another secretary, however, he and John Ducoing left Galveston on January 1, 1818. A Mr. Rivard acted as secretary and oversaw the merchandise. Did he do any writing? Was he on Galveston in the Fall of 1819?

Further research revealed Antoine's handwriting on an order by Robidoux, a French fur trader, dated 4 June, 1818. This handwriting was only a few words above Jean Laffite's signature but these words were definitely written by Antoine. Therefore, it is known that Antoine was on Galveston from late Spring 1818 to the end of 1819 or the first part of 1820, about a year and a half. This was the first time that he had been with his father for more than a few days or a week or so. In all probability he wrote a number of letters, notes, and documents for his father but none survived. During this time Antoine really became acquainted with his father. He admired his ability

to control some pretty rough characters. At the same time the captains and crews knew Jean Laffite to be an honest man so they trusted him to handle their merchandise and get it to the market. From other sources it is known that Jean had a good, likable personality and was kind and courteous. After J. Randall Jones' visit he stated that Laffite was a refined, cultured gentleman. He welcomed visitors and entertained them with his stories and jokes. Antoine developed respect and love for his father. He was not a pirate or privateer at that time.

On May 7, 1820, Jean Laffite set fire to his commune in Galveston and sailed south with his men in three vessels: the *General Victoria*, the *Minerva*, and the *Blanche*. Later, probably the same year, Antoine and Lucien traveled to Europe and France. Here they came under the spell of Communism, their slogans, their literature, and the communists leaders Marx and Engels. (It was the sons and not Jean Laffite that went to Europe) They left France and went to St. Croix to visit their mother's relatives. Back in the States, at some point in time, Antoine settled in Philadelphia where he taught languages in a school on Prunes Street for several years.

Four years after Jean Laffite's demise the first of a long, long line of romance novels (or pure fiction) was published starting in 1827. It was titled *Lafitte, the Baratarian Chief* with eight reprints. In 1836 *Lafitte, The Pirate of the Gulf* was published with several reprints. In the 1840s, several writers began to speculate what might have happened to Jean Laffite. William Bollaert, Junius Booth, the *National Intelligencer*, the *Missouri Gazette*, *Niles Weekly*, *Charleston Courier*, *Courier de Louisiane*, all carried stories about Jean Laffite. Some of these were weird, wild tales, love affairs, and other half truths.

With so much confusion and false information being published, Antoine decided he wanted his father's descendants to know the Jean Laffite that he knew, admired, and lived with in 1818-1820. He wanted to give a true account of the life and times of Jean Laffite. In the 1860s he wrote the

Journal in first person as if Jean had written it. Naturally, Antoine told what he wanted to tell to place Jean in good light for his descendants. He did not fail to embellish, augment, and even exaggerate at times. He wrote from his fading memory of Captains, crews, ships, cargoes, events, and used old newspapers, books (?) and from material in the three trunks shipped from Galveston that contained business transactions, names of persons, merchants, bills of sale, etc.

Antoine probably did not know what happened to his father after he left Galveston in 1820 or to his Uncle Pierre. He might have heard rumors of some of his adventures in the Caribbean. Jean sometimes got the blame for captures made by other pirates. One even used Laffite's name to hide his true identity. The death of Jean Laffite in a sea battle off of Honduras never reached the newspapers, quarterlies, or history books in the United States. After 1820, Antoine wrote what he wished had happened; that his father did return to the United States, married, and had a happy life until old age. It is only natural that he did not want his father to be remembered as dying on the high seas as a pirate. Antoine also painted a better picture of his Uncle Pierre. Rather than having him dying in Yucatan in a gun battle with another pirate, Molas, he had him returning to the States and living with his son, Eugene, to an old age.¹⁰

Antoine wrote the Journal in the late 1850s-1860s. There are events and inventions that were made in the 1850s that are included, therefore, placing the writing of the Journal in the 1860s. It was necessary to go back and place the dates of the writing in the 1845 to 1850 because Laffite "died in 1854". Antoine, after writing long hand 250 pages for the original Journal and then making a clean 250 page copy that we now have, was sure some intelligent person would invent an apparatus that would make writing easier and more quickly. After just a few years, in 1873, the first patent for a typewriter was issued. His involvement with Communism when he was in Europe

made him cognizant that Communism was in direct conflict with the ruling families. Eventually, there would be an open rebellion. This is what happened in Russia and Spain.

The first sentence in the Journal states that it was written for Jean Laffite's descendants. This is made more emphatic, that it is just for his descendants when stated: "I feel I must compile records....a chronicle to compile for my grandchildren that they alone may keep and no one else will know of ". When Laffite aficionados discuss, dissect, and languish over the Journal, they are invading what was intended for only the descendants. Antoine did not spend time checking dates, places, events, or locations. There

are many errors and inaccuracies. It is not a history book. There probably was not material available to do checking. After 40 years his memory was dim. The public should understand -- this was a son writing about his father and placing him in a good light for his descendants. Read it and enjoy it or don't read it at all.

Jean Laffite came out of nowhere to enter the World's stage. He played his part well, then made his exit into oblivion. His true demise never reached the papers, quarterlies, or history books in the United States. This gave many budding authors a character for many romantic novels that are still appearing even today.

Part B is continued on the next page.

Part B

Handwriting

The Journal of Jean Laffite, the two Long letters, and the LeBrave document were all written by the same person for different reasons, therefore, each has a different style. The Journal was written as a book to be read by many descendants and to be handed down through the years. The font size is small and each page is covered with words. The Long letters were written for a person to read once or twice and then be discarded. The LeBrave document was a certificate of instruction to the Captain. The font is large, the wording brief, and to the point, especially the Articles.

What is unique or different in the handwriting of the above items that would indicate that all were written by the same person? To distinguish this person's handwriting from the normal 1850 French handwriting, it will be necessary to find good examples of handwriting at that time to compare. These were found in the Fosh Laffite collection in the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center in Liberty, Texas.¹¹ In this collection there are ten or twelve legal (?) documents that are written in clear, legible, secretarial style, longhand French. The earliest document is dated in the 1830s, then others, at intervals, until 1886. The Journal has six letters (o, a, q, g, s and r) in handwriting that are unique and different from that of the usual 1850 French. The differences are illustrated below.

Journal: 95% of al o's are narrow.

1850 French Only 5% of all o's are narrow, the remainder are medium between narrow and circular.

voile occasion

Journal: 95% of a's have a wide extension from the body to the down stroke.

1850 French all a's have their down stroke touching the body or close to the body.

@ammendies travers

Journal: all q's have a wide offset extension to the down stroke that goes below the baseline.

1850 French no offset or very little offset.

que qu

Journal: the letter g likewise has a wide offset to the down stroke.

1850 French no offset or very little offset to the down stroke.

Sauvages ravage

Journal: almost all of the letters s written in 1830 and thereafter, have a notch at the top of the down stroke.

1850 French almost no letters s have the notch.

plus espagnols

Journal: the letter r is the most unique of all. When r is the first letter of a word, there is a dot at the beginning of the upstroke that curves upwards to the right. From the top of the upstroke there is a concave extension to the down stroke. The down stroke slants slightly to the left to the base line. The upstroke usually starts above the baseline and is shorter than the down stroke. This unique r is so diagnostic of the Journal handwriting, I have labeled them as "signature" r's.

1850 French these r's are not found in any writings. If one is found it is accidentally made.

baise retruite rendre.

A single s may appear as an f.
The letter t appears as an inverted v.
The letter h looks like the English letter k.
There was no k in French writing until the 20th century.
In the letter f, the loop below the baseline is to the left.

Dr. Gene Marshall made a second translation of the Journal in 1999. He concluded the author uses French fluently albeit sloppily at times...slips into Spanish or English...reveals familiarity with those two languages. It is not clear which language is the writer's first...the author must be limited to someone who is at least trilingual.¹²

In the small copy book there is a page written in longhand English and signed Anton Laffite, dated 1831, Phil. There is also another page in the same handwriting dated 1831, Phil, A. Laffite. (see exhibit A) On close inspection of the individual letters, there are found 1850 French letters, Journal letters, and normal English letters. First, scan for the unique o, a, q, g, s, and r's that are found in the Journal. Note there are both narrow Journal o's and wider English o's. Almost all a's are Journal a's. The q's and g's are Journal. Most of the s's are notched, a few are English with no notch. There are three "signature" r's found in the words: rejects, rid and regulate. All h's are 1850 French. There are both French and English t's, and a mixture of the other letters.

Anton signing his last name "Laffite" is not a surprise as most of the Laffite signatures in the copy book have one f and a double t.

An order for merchandise to Laffite and Laffite, Port de Campeche, from French Fur Trader, JR Robideaux, dated 4 June 1818, has Jn Laffite's signature at the bottom of the page. Just above this signature is: "Payee recevra a Alexandrie". The three r's in this passage are "signature" r's. This indicates that Antoine who wrote the Journal was on Galveston as early as June 1818 and remained on Galveston to write the Long letters and the LeBrave document in the Fall of 1819, a total of at least 16 months. (see exhibit B)

The handwriting of Antoine Laffite, son of Jean Laffite, indicates that he wrote the Long letters, and the LeBrave documents while he was on Galveston, and then lived long enough to write the Journal, all being in the same handwriting. He certainly was trilingual. He knew family history and while on Galveston became familiar with privateers, ships, handling of merchandise, slave trade, and filibustering.

When I first became a member of the Laffite Society, it was generally acknowledged that Jean Laffite did not write the Journal. Since no Laffite aficionado came forward with suggestion or proof regarding the author of the Journal, my thought was to find the person whose handwriting was a match to the handwriting of the Journal. This paper is the result of five years of research. My conclusion is that Jean's Laffite's son, Jean Antoine, was the author of Laffite's Journal. I am satisfied that I have solved this problem though other may not agree with me.

Keep the soul always concentrated from straying.
Regulate the breath and become soft and pliant
like an infant?

Be clean and get rid of the unbecoming and be free
from faults?

Do you love the people and govern the state by
non-action?

Do you open and shut the gates of nature like a
male?

Do you become enlightened and penetrate everywhere
like a flame?

1831 Antoine Lafitte

The five colors will render a man's sight.

The five sounds will render a man's hearing.

The five tastes will spoil a man's palate.

Chasing and hunting will drive a man wild.

Things hard to get will do harm to a conduct.

A sensible man will provide for the stomach
and not for the eye.

He rejects the latter and chooses the former.

1831

Phil^a Lafitte

EXHIBIT A

Two pages from a small copy book written in English by Antoine Lafitte, dated 1831. Note there are letters that are Journal letters, others that are English letters, and finally there are 1850 French letters. Note the signature r's in the words: rejects, rid and regulate. This copy book was in the TV station fire, therefore, the burnt edges.

Parce recevra a Alexandria
Jean Laffite

EXHIBIT B

Order of cargo permit. Merchandise shipped from Donaldsonville to Joseph Robidoux in St. Louis. Payment to be made in Alexandria. Signed by Jean Laffite, Port Campeche. John de La Porta (secretary) 4 June 1818. Note two signature r's in the word "recevra" and the signature r in "drie". The capital A is like that found in Laffite's Journal.

tification. art 7.
 Tout homme qui dans un engagement aura perdu
 l'usage d'un de ses membres recevra une indemnité de
 deux cents piastres, prélevés sur le montant des profits.
art 8.

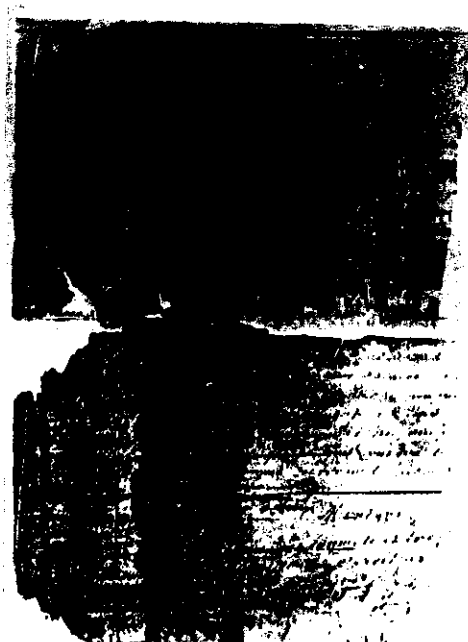
Article 7 of the LeBrave Instructions to the Captain. Note the Journal letters and the signature r in the beginning of the word "recevra".



Letter written 7 July, 1819, by (or for) Jean Laffite on Galveston to James Yong (Long) in Nacogdoches. Much of this letter has suffered water stain damage.

Note the magnified section of this letter containing a signature r in the word vrai (true) with Journal type a.

Both this letter and the one below are in the same handwriting. Therefore, the person who wrote the Journal was on Galveston in the Fall of 1819 and then lived long enough to have written the Journal in the 1860s.



A second letter dated September 30, 1819, by Jean Laffite to Mr. James Long. This letter has faded and has been severely damaged by water stain.

De confiance que ma faire regretter plus
avis concernant ma santé personnelle
actuelle.

Veuillez compter sur ma reconnaissance
qui est au delà des expressions

Jean Laffite

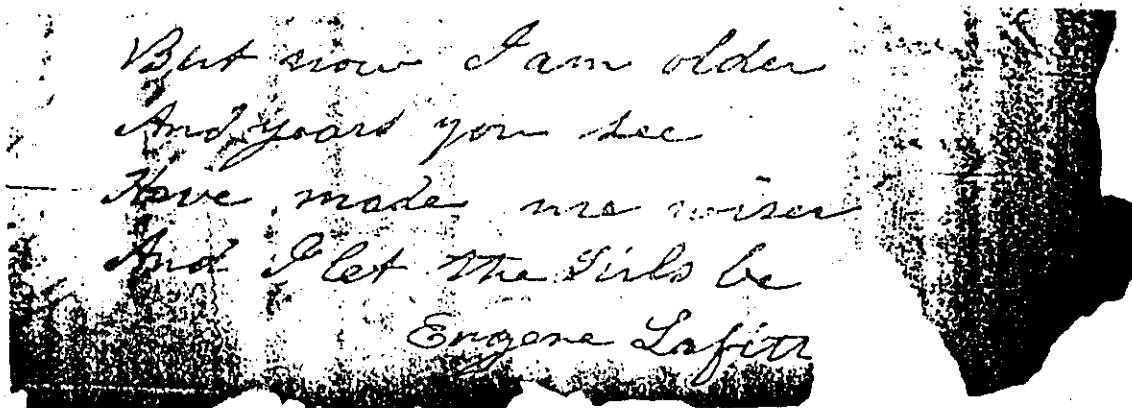
Le 4 Octobre 1814



A letter written by Jean Laffite dated October 4, 1814. Note the poor penmanship. Dr. Vella and Dr. Redmond of Tulane, translators of this letter, found the "writer just barely literate, ignorant of much basic grammar". For this reason Jean Laffite had a secretary write his letters. Only 3 or 4 have been found written by Jean Laffite.

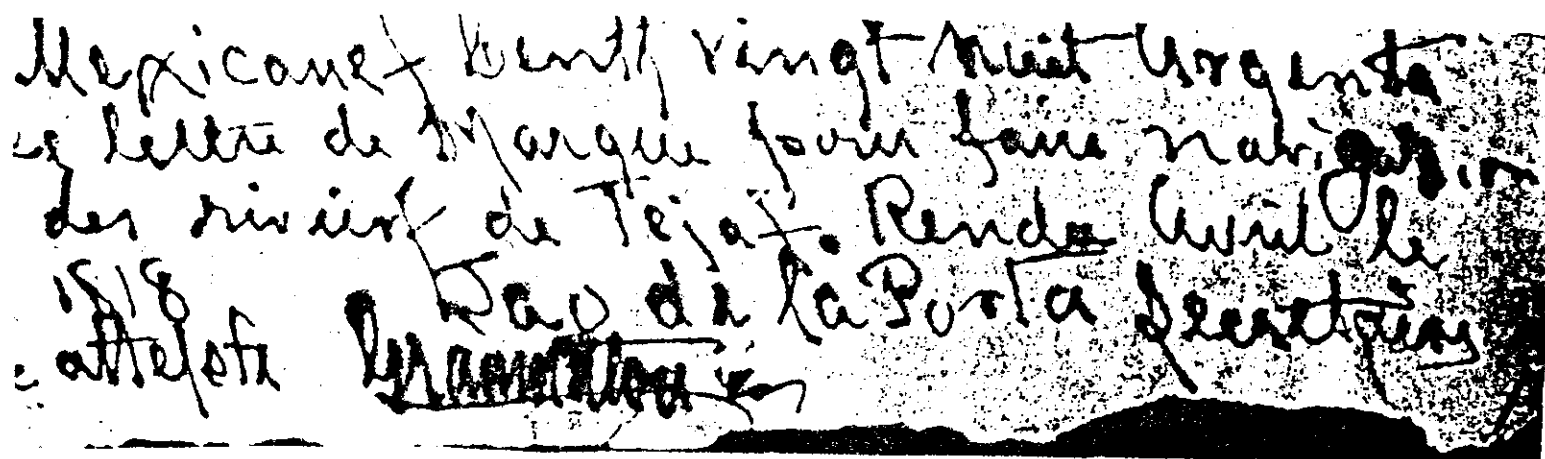
enchaînait à s'apercevoir que tout en recevant de gros-
ses de mes, pour soutenir les royalistes Espagnols au
Texas, je ruinais en même temps leurs services
retrouvais à la source de leurs reserves sur mer,
affaiblissait l'armée Espagnole à l'intérieur du
Texas. Ce retour dans ma commune de Palveston,

Several sentences from Laffite's Journal showing signature r's that are underlined. Note the o's, a's, j's, g's and s's.



But now I am older
 And years you see
 Have made me wiser
 And I let the Girls be
 Eugene Laffite

Handwriting of Eugene Laffite, obviously, he did not write the Journal. Pierre Laffite spoke of Eugene as his son. Actually, he was the son of Yvonne, Pierre's sister. Eugene arrived on Galveston February, 1818, and was there for "some time."



Mexicanes bent vingt huit Urgente
 et lettre de marque pour faire navigation
 des rivières de Tejas. Rendre civil le
 1818
 atteste Joa de La Porta Secrétaire
 Grammaton

Handwriting of Joa de La Porta. He was known to have been on Galveston and acted as secretary but apparently left for New Orleans the middle of 1819. Attested by Grammaton. This handwriting is completely different from the Journal.

Galveston le 28 aout 1818

Monsieur

En réponse à la lettre que vous m'avez fait l'honneur de m'écrire le 26, sans entrer dans le détail des motifs qui m'ont déterminés à occuper le fort de Galveston,

Writing by a person, not identified, on Galveston 28 Aug. 1818. May be the writing of Mr. Rivard, said to have been secretary to Jean Laffite. Again, this handwriting is different from that of the Journal.

Endnotes

1. Davis, William C., *The Pirates Laffite*, Harcourt , 2005 p. 198.
2. Howells, John, Handwriting Analyses of the Journal of Jean Laffite. Unpublished report on file in the Laffite Archives, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.
3. Fretz, Gary, "Laffite's Legacy" *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, Vol. 1X Number 1 February, 2003.
4. Davis, William C., *Pirates Laffite*, Harcourt, 2005 pp. 410-411, 479.
5. Laffite, Jean, *The Journal of Jean Laffite* 1958 p. 125.
6. These "copy books" are part of the Laffite Collection at the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas. There are three listed as large, medium, and small. The two smaller ones are similar to present day autograph books.
7. Marshall, Gene, *The Memoirs of Jean Laffite*, Xlibris Corp. p. 158.
8. Harrison, Alan, "Jean Laffite was Buried in Alton, Illinois" Unpublished Report p. 24. Report in my personal files listed under Alan Harrison.
9. Marshall, Gene, *The Memoirs of Jean Laffite*, Xlibris Corp. p. 181.
10. Laffite, Antoine, small copy book, Laffite collection, Sam Houston Regional Library, Liberty Texas. Family genealogy shows Eugene to be the son of Yvonne, sister to Jean Laffite.
11. Fosh Laffite (Lafitte) was a descendant of the Lafittes in Northwestern Louisiana and not related to Jean and Pierre Laffite.
12. Marshall, Gene, *Laffite Society Chronicles*, Volume VI Number 1 Feb. 2000.

BOOK REVIEW

Groom Offers His Version of the Battle of New Orleans

Pam Keyes

For the first time ever, two new history books with Laffite in the title are in the bookstores this May: one is the paperback edition of William C. Davis' *The Pirates Laffite, the Treacherous World of the Corsairs of the Gulf*. The other, surprisingly, is *Patriotic Fire, Andrew Jackson and Jean Laffite at the Battle of New Orleans* by Winston Groom, famous for his *Forrest Gump* literary creation. Davis' book is by far the better history, built on years of solid, painstaking research in myriad archives. *Patriotic Fire*, however, is more of a popular history, much leaner in both page number and depth of detail, and there is absolutely no new research to be found in it. In style, it is like a gently novelized amalgamation of Latour's history, Walker's *Jackson and New Orleans*, and the British accounts by Gleig and Cooke, among others.

Groom seems to have wanted to spark a controversy with his *Battle of New Orleans* account, as he chose to quote from the *Journal of Jean Laffite* among the many books he read to compile this condensed opus about the joint efforts of Old Hickory and Laffite at Chalmette. In the notes chapter at the end of the book, even though he acknowledges the history of the dispute over the Laffite Journal's authenticity, Groom says he incorporated it for the simple reason that many other historians such as Robert Remini, Dr. Jane de Grummond, and Stanley Clisby Arthur had used that material, too. He says it is a case of deductive logic, that "as of right now, they (the Journal and associated collection) cannot be proved or disproved." I would add here that author H.W. Brands also stated in his book, *Andrew Jackson, His Life and Times* (2005) that he considered the Laffite Journal to be "probably authentic, although the provenance is

sketchy." In response to my recent letter to him, Groom replied that he has his own doubts about the provenance of the Laffite Journal, but he thinks it "might

very probably be authentic." He told me he had already written *Patriotic Fire* and was reviewing its galleys before he saw Davis' thoroughly researched *The Pirates Laffite*. He is still sticking by his opinion about the Laffite Journal (and without even seeing it!). He did have what he recalled as a very long telephone conversation with Dr. Robert Schaadt of the Sam Houston Regional Library about the Laffite Journal collection. Because he depended on the Laffite Journal and unreliable folklore sources, Groom stokes the fire of the Laffite legend anew, starting with Laffite's use of the blacksmith shop as a smuggling front! And because he didn't look at the original sources at the archives, he didn't notice the errors regarding some files, like the one for the Sept. 10, 1814 letter which Pierre Laffite, not Jean, wrote to Gov. Claiborne. Pierre is mentioned in Groom's book, but only in scattered instances, most notably during the jail escape.

Groom's book started out promisingly enough, with the introductory revelation that through family papers he had discovered his great-great-great-grandfather, Elijah Montgomery, was a member of the 7th Regiment with Gen. Jackson, and most interesting, was personally promoted to major by Jackson on Jan. 8, 1815. Jackson noted Montgomery's "gallant conduct" in official dispatches of the day. Then he went on to say that his illustrious ancestor must have met Jean Laffite and his pirates at the battlefield. I thought, great, it looks like Groom did some genealogical studies and uncovered a

new viewpoint of the Battle of New Orleans, but alas, the prologue is where this tantalizing tidbit ended. The rest is basically a well-tied together summative rehash of most of the prominent historical books and booklets done about the Battle of New Orleans, Andrew Jackson, and Jean Laffite since that day at Chalmette. *Patriotic Fire* does have its good points, however, and these come when Groom steps away from synthesis and summation to interpret the history he reports. He gives credit to Laffite for performing a "valuable and patriotic service when he might just as easily have sailed out of danger as a very wealthy man." He even states that Laffite "and the Baratarians' contributions to the American victory were substantial, if not crucial." Furthermore, Groom outlines the dire consequences of what would have happened if the British had won at Chalmette: he says it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to dislodge them, especially if their fleet with their heavy guns could be sailed upriver on the Mississippi.

His most interesting observation,

however, is how a sequence of events set in motion so much in history related to the Battle of New Orleans: first Tecumseh came to Alabama, then William Weatherford went on the warpath. Andrew Jackson stopped Weatherford and his followers with the Creek Indian War victory, which led to Jackson's commission as major general in the United States Army and his defense duty at New Orleans. Jackson's victory at New Orleans and the fervor of patriotism that followed him led to his winning the presidency as the first populist president. He became the father of the modern Democratic party. But, Jackson also became infamous for ordering the Indian Removal Bill, which resulted in the Cherokees being force-marched to what is now Oklahoma. All in all, if you can accept the book's shortcomings in terms of hands-on research, it is a good summation of the Battle of New Orleans and the key players in it. *Patriotic Fire, Andrew Jackson and Jean Laffite at the Battle of New Orleans* by Winston Groom and published by Knopf, is listed at \$26.00. There are 8 pages of photographs and three maps.

Margaret Earthman
1934-2005

Her spirit and energy live on in our memories and thoughts of the Margaret we knew. She was a compassionate woman with a big heart. She always was eager to share Eibands and her home for special events and even her lunch if she thought you hadn't eaten. Margaret loved to shop and loved to see others get what they wanted as well.

I met her through fellow Laffite members Bill and Bernadette Foley and later worked for Jim and Margaret Earthman for 2 ½ years managing Eibands Antique Gallery previously a historic Galveston land mark, the Eibands department store. The Earthmans renovated the building and in December of 2005 we opened the largest antique store on the Island and in our years together we helped to re-define the ArtWalk events by furnishing food and spirits and became the social gathering place for the, as Doris Sutton would put it, Galveston café society.

Eibands was home to the Laffite Society after our formative meetings at Diane and Dale Olson's home on Sealy. We used the beautiful conference room at Eibands for our monthly meeting and many parties. The Earthmans were eager to share the 16,000 square foot Gallery to host many charitable events such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Strand Theatre fundraisers, wall space for the Galveston art league, our grand opening and our anniversary parties. Margaret's open door policy with the Antique business helped us get acquainted with some of the finest people. Margaret and Jim were always in attendance and as Jim Earthman used to say, "You have to eat somewhere."

My fondest memory of Margaret besides the drive to San Miguel de Allende with she and Jim and the many buying trips to Dallas Market to purchase new items for the store was the Laffite field trip to Grand Isle- Grand Terre.

Margaret distinguished herself as a trooper, leading the beach gang in search of treasure, from Ft. Livingston across the partially flooded, snake infested Grand Terre to the sandy beach to search for pottery shards. Meanwhile the wild life and fisheries guide and I led a less discriminating group through the alligator and snake infested marsh to the small shell middens on the back side of the island. The spirit of adventure and the love of history are just some of the bonds shared by the Laffite Society members on that memorable trip with Margaret.

She will always be missed and she will always be present!

Jim Nonus

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

Member, Robert "Bob" Looper, passed away in November.

The Laffite Society webpage now has two new items: (1) a section entitled "Timeline" of activities of the Laffites and (2) a Question and Answer (Q & A) section.

New Members

Elizabeth Ergovich, Shawnee, KS, 11/7/2005
Rob and Carolyn Peterson, Houston, TX, 11/7/2005
Nancy Beaman, Houston, TX, 4/17/2006

THE LAFFITE SOCIETY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
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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