

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JEAN LAFFITE

June, 1982

Number VI

Galveston le 26. avril 1918.

Monsieur

J'ai m'empêché de répondre à la
lettre que vous m'avez fait l'honneur
de m'écrire, et de ce que vous auriez eu
la complaisance de me donner comme
des pouvoirs que vous avez, et qui vous
autorisent à me faire des questions de
cette nature.

J'ai l'honneur d'être

Monsieur

Votre très obéissant
serviteur.
J. Laffite

The Laffite Study Group

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JEAN LAFFITE

A Publication of the Laffite Study Group

MANAGING EDITOR

Robert C. Vogel

The Laffite Study Group was formed in 1975 for the purpose of uniting individuals who share an interest in Jean Laffite's role in American history, folklore and literature. Members pay annual dues and receive The Life and Times of Jean Laffite, a collection of occasional papers, and the LSG Newsletter, published quarterly.

Contributions and correspondence relating to LTJL should be sent to the Managing Editor: Robert C. Vogel, 6971 Homestead Avenue South, Cottage Grove, Minnesota 55016.

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Single copies of The Life and Times of Jean Laffite, Number VI, are available to non-members at a cost of six dollars, plus postage and handling.

Cover: Jean Laffite to George Graham, Galveston, 26 August, 1818. (For English translation, see page 9, *infra*.) Graham-Laffite Correspondence, Special Agents, Department of State MSS, Library of Congress.

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Number VI

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THE SHORT LIFE OF DOMINIQUE YOU:
NEW ORLEANS' MOST POPULAR MAN

By Lionel Bienvenue

According to Jean Laffite's memoirs, his oldest brother, Alexandre Frederic, was born in 1772 in Port-au-Prince, San Domingue (now Haiti). His parents were Marcus Laffite and Maria Zore Nadrimal, both of French birth.

The senior Laffite had been in the Morocco leather trade in both Spain and France before the family removed to the New World. After settling in Port-au-Prince, Marcus established a leather business and shop. His sons were expected to work with him. Jean and Pierre, and later their brothers Marcus and Henri, took up the leather trade -- but Alexandre could never settle down to it.

He went to sea first with his uncle, Rene Beluche, who was about the same age and a native of New Orleans. After several voyages in the Caribbean and to Africa and Europe, Alexandre signed on aboard a corsair commanded by Captain John Puilijon, a veteran privateersman.

Alexandre and Captain Puilijon cruised the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico for several years and made periodic visits to the Laffite family at Port-au-Prince. During these visits, Alexandre and Puilijon would regale the Laffite boys, especially Pierre and Jean, with stories of their seafaring adventures. Captain Puilijon told them never to disclose their real names or places of origin while privateering. At about that time, Alexandre decided to adopt the nom de guerre Dominique You.(1)

In 1801, Dominique You left the Caribbean to go to France and enlist in Napoleon's army. While in the Napoleonic service, he became an expert artillerist and rose to the rank of captain. It is thought that both Jean and Pierre Laffite, as well as Rene Beluche, spent some time with Dominique while he was in the French army. They may have encountered General Jean Humbert, Field Marshall Robin and Captain St. Geme at this time -- all of whom were to play important roles in the Battle of New Orleans.

While Dominique and Beluche were still serving in France, Jean and Pierre became privateers and were smuggling slaves into Pensacola,

Mobile and New Orleans. On one occasion, in 1803, they brought three vessels, laden with slaves, up to the northern port cities of the Gulf of Mexico, but were unable to off-load their cargo due to new trading regulations. They sailed westward and finally dropped anchor off the islands of Grand Isle and Grande Terre. There the Laffites met Louis Chighizola, Francois Rigaud and Jean Perrin, local fishermen, who were delighted to peddle the slaves for the privateers.

The Laffite brothers decided to stay at Barataria and established their headquarters there. The first privateers' and smugglers' convention was held at Grande Terre Island early in 1805. Dominique and Beluche were able to join the Laffites at that time. Also involved were Vincent Gambi and Beluche's cousins, Eugene and Jerome La Porte. The latter were book-keepers; their family owned the house known today as Madame John's Legacy (birthplace of Rene Beluche) and another building which was to become very important to the privateers' operation, the place known to us as Laffite's Blacksmith Shop.(3)

Jean Laffite was elected "bos" of Barataria and directed the smuggling and privateering operation from Grande Terre. Pierre Laffite, with Rigaud and Chighizola, set up on Grand Isle. Perrin established the Temple and Little Temple in Barataria, while Gambi and Beluche went out privateering. The La Porte brothers and Dominique You proceeded to New Orleans.

Dominique was described as a short man, perhaps five feet and four inches tall; dark and swarthy, with flashing black eyes and an aquiline nose; and shoulders twice as broad as an average man's. The left side of his face was scarred by powder burns, making him appear ferocious. Dominique had a reputation for being strong and stubborn as an ox.

We assume that the La Portes set up their "front" operation at the blacksmith shop on Bourbon Street and the house next door in 1805. Dominique took a cottage at the corner of Love (now Rampart) and Mandeville streets in the Faubourg Marigny, near Joseph Sauvinet, the Laffite's new business agent.

The Laffite brothers and Beluche took turns at taking privateers out onto the Caribbean. The Baratarians were capturing mostly English shipping during this period. Dominique came onto a fine vessel Jean had captured, had it re-fitted as a corsair and named it El Tigre. Other privateer captains in the fleet included Beluche, Gambi and Chighizola. By this time, Spain was allied with Britain in the war against Napoleon, so the Laffites' prizes included Spanish vessels. Thousands of refugees, slave and free, were brought in to Barataria from the West Indies.

Dominique had been overseeing the sale of contraband in New Orleans, at Maspero's Exchange in the city and along the coast. The Laffites

decided in 1812 to hold regular weekend auctions of slaves and goods at the Temple, a large shell mound in the Baratarian swamps, located about mid-way between Grande Terre and New Orleans. The auctions became a huge success, attracting large gatherings of Mississippi River planters. It must be remembered that anyone who purchased a slave or any other goods at a Laffite auction was guilty of violating the smuggling laws of the United States; and almost the entire free population of the Mississippi Delta region participated!

Louisiana became a state in 1812, with William Charles Cole Claiborne (formerly the Territorial governor) in the executive office. Six weeks later, (4) the United States declared war on Great Britain. Six American privateers were commissioned at New Orleans during the War of 1812, one of them Rene Beluche's Spy. The Royal Navy applied a blockade along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. The privateers were about the only ones who could get through.

It was during the years 1812-1815 that the empire of the Laffite brothers reached its zenith. The organization expanded to nearly 6,000 men and 98 ships. We estimate that by 1815, the Baratarian privateering and smuggling operation was the biggest business in the United States. Ships were being built in Philadelphia, Charleston and Baltimore as well as in New Orleans. The Laffites had agents in all these cities, as well as Saint Louis, Cincinnati, Natchez and Natchitoches. Operations were being carried out in Texas, Mexico, Cartagena, the West Indies, the Red River Valley and into the northern and western stretches of the Louisiana Purchase territories.

In August, 1813, Dominique captured two British slavers off the island of Barbados, which he delivered successfully to Grande Terre. He took part in several defensive actions against British men-of-war during this period. In April, 1814, aboard El Tigre, Dominique took an armed British merchantman off Nautla, Mexico. Returning from Nautla with the merchantman and a Spanish felucca, Dominique founded the New Orleans association with ten thousand dollars in silver contributed by the Mexican revolutionaries. The association members included: Edward Livingston, John Randolph Grymes, Abner L. Duncan, John K. West, Pierre Duplessis, Benjamin Morgan and Captain Henry Perry, U.S.A. Dominique loaded the captured felucca with 80,000 pounds of gunpowder and returned to Nautla on June 20, 1814.

While Dominique was thus involved, Gambi and Beluche commanded squadrons operating in the Gulf, destroying Spanish and British shipping. These captains were able to keep Grande Terre well supplied with captured vessels and their cargoes.

When the British visited Grande Terre on September 3, 1814, Jean Laffite's forty warehouses there contained prize goods worth more than one million dollars. The British officers offered him a bribe of thirty

thousand dollars. They also offered to free Pierre Laffite from his cell at the Cabildo, where he had been a chained and manacled resident since his arrest in July, 1814.

It was at this time that John Grymes resigned as District Attorney and became Pierre's lawyer. Even with the help of powerful friends, Jean and Dominique could not spring Pierre from the calabozo. The brothers did persuade a legislator, Jean Blanque, to carry the message of the British offer to Governor Claiborne. The Governor would not believe them and ordered a joint navy-army expedition to attack the Laffite establishment at Grande Terre. The Baratarians, commanded by Dominique, decided not to fight the Americans and dispersed into the swamps and bayous. Some gathered at Last Island and Caminada after the Patterson-Ross expedition departed; many were taken prisoner.

While the attack was going on, Jean Laffite and his friends arranged Pierre's escape from the Cabildo.

On September 10, 1814, Jean wrote to Governor Claiborne, requesting a pardon for the Baratarians. Jean wrote: "I have never sailed under any flag but that of the republic of Carthage, and my vessels are perfectly regular in that respect. If I could have brought my lawful prizes into the ports of this state, I should not have employed the illicit means that have caused me to be prosecuted..."

Pierre, meanwhile, having taken ill during his stay in the Cabildo, was sent to a plantation on Bayou La Fourche to recuperate.

Both Dominique You and Rene Beluche were captured by Patterson and Ross in their raid on Grande Terre. They and eighty others were taken back to New Orleans, along with twenty-six captured vessels, among them Beluche's General Bolivar. Dominique and his men were locked up in the Cabildo while the navy and military made claims against more than sixty thousand dollars' worth of goods taken from the Baratarians.

In the summer of 1814, General Andrew Jackson was promoted to command of Military District No. 7, which included Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana. Jackson and his 2900 men arrived at Mobile about the same time British forces under Colonel Nichols took Pensacola. Jackson sent for reinforcements from Tennessee and Kentucky and began preparing to defend New Orleans.

While the British were making their initial unsuccessful attack on Mobile, Jackson received a packet of letters from Claiborne, including the correspondence between Laffite and the British. Jackson at first refused any aid from the Baratarians. Arriving in New Orleans, Jackson added Livingston, Grymes and August Davezac, all Laffite associates, to his staff. Following the disaster on Lake Borgne, Jackson reconsidered, realizing that he needed all of the resources at hand if the Americans

were to avert total disaster.

Following Jean Laffite's orders, Dominique and Rene Beluche reported for service at Fort Saint John with the other Baratarian prisoners to begin training two artillery companies. Jean Laffite remained at Fort Saint John through most of the British invasion.

In his journal, Laffite noted that he contributed more than 400 artillerists and 366 guns to Jackson's army. These men were whipped into shape by Dominique and Beluche; one battery was placed at the Temple, another at Fort Petite Coquilles on the Rigolets with a third at Fort Saint Phillippe on the Mississippi. Some men and guns remained at Fort Saint John, on Lake Pontchartrain.

When the British attacked the American line at Chalmette on December 28, Dominique, Beluche and the other Baratarian artillerymen were lined up along the Rodriguez Canal. Dominique and Beluche took command of Battery No. 3, which included a long-barrelled twenty-four pounder. One British officer described the battery as "a motley group of men traversing and elevating a gun for the purpose of throwing lob shot over the heads of the outposts and into the principal bivouac." He continues that one of the artillerymen was decked out with a red woolen cap, another with the hat of a miller, etc.

In the famous Artillery Duel of January 1, 1815, the Baratarian gunners were conspicuous. Dominique was standing on the parapet at Battery No. 3, studying the enemy through a spy-glass, when a cannon ball whizzed by and scorched his arm. He screamed a curse and shook his fist, crying in French, "I'll make you pay for this!"

After calming himself, Dominique ordered his gun to be loaded. His first shot knocked the biggest British gun to pieces. Beluche fired his twenty-four pounder while Dominique re-loaded. These two kept up a steady, alternate fire. After forty minutes, five enemy guns were dismounted. These losses, in addition to seventy casualties and a shortage of ammunition, caused the British to cease firing.

Early one morning, Jackson was riding the line, and smelled the wonderful aroma of coffee brewing. He reined in at Battery No. 3 to share a cup with Dominique, who was brewing it in his old tin-coated iron French drip pot. Jackson told Dominique that the coffee smelled better than the army's and asked where he had gotten it; was it smuggled in? Dominique grinned and said, maybe so, and filled Old Hickory's cup. Later Jackson remarked: "If I were ordered to storm the gates of hell, with Captain Dominique as my lieutenant, I would have no misgivings of the result."

At the main engagement on January 8, Battery No. 3 was in action from dawn until two o'clock in the afternoon. American artillery did terrific damage to the British lines and batteries. More than 2,000

British dead were reported.

Jean Laffite was to write in his journal: "My brother Alexander, who was the most expert marksman in the battery, had with one shot knocked the English general Packenhan from his horse, tearing off both his legs."

Andrew Jackson praised the Baratarian cannoneers and marvelled at the merit of the soldiers and Beluche's marksmanship. The Baratarians remained on the battlefield twenty-two days. They were pardoned by President James Madison in February, 1815.

Dominique's health had been deteriorating since before the battle and as his suffering increased, he began to drink more. When Jean and Pierre moved to Galveston, Dominique elected to stay behind in New Orleans, where he married and ran a tavern. The establishment was located at the corner of Saint Ann and Water Street; Dominique's wife was the bar-maid. He remained in this occupation until his death in 1830. Many of his souvenirs from the army and privateering were hanging around the walls. According to Stanley Clisby Arthur's Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover, young Abraham Lincoln visited the tavern twice, while he was working on keel boats along the Mississippi. Dominique and his wife kept a house, on the corner of Love (now Rampart) and Mandeville Street.

When Alexandre Frederic Laffite, alias Dominique You, died on November 11, 1830, all businesses in New Orleans closed and flags were flown at half-mast. L'Abeille and the other newspapers published notices, calling on friends to attend Dominique's funeral. All remembered the words of Andrew Jackson: "Captains Dominique and Beluche were stationed at Nos. 3 and 4. The general cannot avoid giving his warm approbation... of the gallantry with which they redeemed the pledge they gave at the opening of the campaign to defend the country."

"Captain Dominique You, well known for his virtues and his intrepidity, cherished and esteemed by every Louisianian and American, for the signal services which he rendered this State and Union during the invasion of the British, is no more," wrote the editor of the Courier; "Captain Dominique, to whom fortune has never been very favorable, died almost in want; but no sooner did these circumstances become known to the members of the city council, than they hastened to pay the sacred debt which this city owed for the efforts of this brave man, by procuring the suitable necessities for his funeral at the expense of the corporation. Our Legion [the Louisiana Legion, a militia company], who ever know how to appreciate worth, and services rendered to the country, paid military honors to their old companion in arms, and numerous citizens of all classes accompanied his remains to the abode of rest."

Dominique You was carried to Saint Louis Cathedral, where a Mass for the Dead was celebrated. The cure recorded Dominique's funeral in the burial register of the cathedral (5) and the body was taken to Saint

Louis Cemetery No. 2. Dominique was interred with full military honors and the rituals of the Masonic rite -- for many years, Dominique, like so many other refugee men from the French West Indies, had been a member of Masonic Lodge La Concorde No. 3 in New Orleans. A tomb was erected over his grave and the people of New Orleans bestowed perpetual care upon it.

On the marble slab of the tomb, below the Square and Compasses of Masonry, is inscribed a verse from Voltaire:

Intrepide guerrier sur la terre et sur l'onde,
Qui sut dans cent combats signaler sa valeur;
Et ce nouveau Bayard sans reproche et sans peur
Aurait pu, sans trembler voir s'ecrouler le monde!(6)

- Notes -

(1) Sometimes spelled Youx. Dominique signed many documents "frederiex youx" -- always without using capital letters.

(2) For a listing of the Laffite associates, agents, captains, etc., see The Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story (New York: Vantage Press, 1958), pp. 42-44.

(3) Madame John's Legacy is to be found at 632 Dumaine Street, in the Vieux Carre. The traditional site of the Laffite Blacksmith Shop is preserved in the building at 941 Bourbon Street.

(4) June 18, 1812.

(5) The entry for Dominique You's burial in the register of the Saint Louis Cathedral states that the deceased was a native of "St. Jean d'Angeli, department de la Charente Inferieure (France)" and aged about 58 years. Saint Louis Cathedral, Burial Register, Book X, p. 185, Act No. 1139.

(6) In translation:

This warrior bold on land and rolling sea,
In a hundred battles proved his bravery;
Nor had this pure and fearless Bayard known
One tremour, though the world be overthrown!

THE FAMOUS LAFITTES AT GALVESTON

By Charles Gayarre

After the British had been expelled from Louisiana, in 1815, the two Lafittes, who are destined to live for ever in her history, and who, in justice to their memory, should not, in the pages of a truthful and sober narrative, have their actions and character misrepresented as they have been, and will probably continue to be, in the pages of wild fiction, did not depart in haste from the State, like fugitives from justice; and therefore it is not to be supposed, as it is by gullible dupes, that they left treasures buried in any portion of her territory. They took all the time they needed to wind up their affairs, under the protection of the State of Louisiana and of the Federal government, to both of which they had, in the hour of peril, rendered special services that had been taken into due consideration, and had procured for them not only full pardon for past misdeeds, but also an equally full guarantee as to their property, without inquiry into its mode of acquisition. It seems that from New Orleans, when ready to depart, they went to Galveston, in Texas, where they settled with the intention of continuing their depredations on the commerce of Spain, then at war with her rebellious colonies of North and South America, from one of which they pretended to have letters of marque, legally issued.

The possession which they had taken of the island of Galveston was not destined to be of long duration, for in the latter part of August, 1818, Mr. George Graham, who had been in high official position in Washington, under the administrations of Madison and Monroe, arrived at Galveston, and lost no time in addressing to Jean Lafitte the following communication:

Galveston, August 26, 1818

Mr. Jean Lafitte:

Sir: I am instructed by the Government of the United States to call upon you for an explicit avowal of the National authority, if any, by which you have occupied the position and harbor of Galveston, and also to make known to you that the Government of the United States, claiming the country between the Sabine and the Rio Bravo del Norte, will suf-

fer no establishment of any kind, and more particularly one of so questionable character as that now existing at this place, to be made within these limits without any authority. I am, with due respect, etc.

The answer was returned immediately, by Jean Lafitte, in these words:

Galveston, August 26, 1818

I will hasten to reply to the letter with which you have honored me, as soon as you are pleased to acquaint me with the powers that authorize you to propound the questions which you have addressed to me.

I have the honor to be, sir, your very obedient servant.

It seems that Mr. George Graham showed that he was backed by satisfactory credentials, for, on the 28th of August, he received this letter from Lafitte:

Sir: In answer to the letter with which you have honored me on the 26th inst., I have to state, without entering into details as to the motives that had determined me to occupy the fort of Galveston:

That Mr. Aury was in possession and had been constituted Governor of Galveston, in the name of the Mexico Congress, by Minister Erera [sic]. The instability of his character caused him to abandon his post, which was beginning to be something, and which, undoubtedly, would have become of the highest importance.

I was at Galveston at the moment of this abandonment. I conceived the idea of preserving and maintaining it at my own costs. Nobody was disputing my taking possession. In so doing I was satisfying the two passions which imperiously predominate in me, that of offering an asylum to the armed vessels of the party of independence, and that of placing myself in a position (considering its proximity to the United States) to fly to their assistance should circumstances demand it. Securely relying on the uprightness of my intentions, I executed that bold project.

I declare that the most severe orders were given not only to respect the American flag, but also to come to its aid on all occasions; and in this I have acted with a disinterestedness which manifests the purity of my in-

tentions. I will not expatiate on this subject, as you have fortuitously been a witness to the truth of my assertions.

I have on several occasions written to the Mexican Congress to obtain from them the confirmation of my taking possession, and to procure the appointment of such authorities as are primarily necessary to the organization of a regular and legitimate government; but the circumstances of the existing war having compelled the Congress to abandon the place of their assembling, and to remove it to a very great distance from the sea-coasts, it became impossible for my letters to reach their destination.

I was then ignorant of the fact that the American Government had the intention to claim all the country from the Sabine to the Rio Bravo. My conduct has been frank and loyal, and whatever may be the fate reserved to me, I shall be much obliged to you for carrying to your government the assurance of my obedience, and of my entire resignation to its will.

I know, sir, that I have been calumniated in the vilest manner by persons invested with a certain importance; but, fortified by a conscience which is irreproachable in every respect, my internal tranquility has not been affected, and, in spite of my enemies, I shall obtain (undoubtedly in later times) the justice due to me.

I have the honor to be, with the highest consideration, your most humble and obedient servant.

Jean Laffite.

I will here remark that Laffite does not spell his name as the public generally does, "Lafitte."

On the 26th September, 1818, Jean Lafitte thus addressed Mr. George Graham, who had returned to Washington:

Sir: Emboldened by the kind and obliging dispositions which I have observed in you, I am induced to take the liberty to beg you to have the complaisance to grant your good will to my brother, Pierre Laffite, who will deliver to you the present letter, and inform you verbally of what is going on about this locality on the part of the Spaniards.

As soon as apprised of what was to pass I hastened to

cause my young brother to depart for New Orleans, in order that he should forward the dispatches which I address to my brother, who must now be with you.

Please accept, sir, the assurance of my profound respect.

It would be interesting to ascertain, by consulting the archives of the government at Washington, what was the object of the mission of Pierre Lafitte to that city, and what was the nature of the dispatches to which Jean Lafitte alludes.

Before leaving Galveston, Mr. George Graham addressed the following letter to a Mr. Laforest, who seems to have been an agent of the Government of Buenos Ayres at New Orleans. The writer only uses the initials, "B. A.," but it is impossible to imagine that they apply to any other government than the one we mention.

Sir: The Government of the United States having deemed it necessary, as well for the preservation of their neutral relations as for the protection of their revenues, to break up the establishment that had been made at this place, which is considered as being within the limits of the United States, had dispatched me here for that object, and having found Mr. Laffite entirely disposed to acquiesce in the demands of the government for the abandonment of this position, I have recommended it to him to attach his destinies to those of the Government of B. A. It is therefore that he sends to you Mr. _____ (illegible), a gentleman of character and information, whom I beg leave to introduce to your attentions, to ascertain whether you or any other agents are authorized by your government to issue commissions, or whether they could be obtained through you. What is very important to Mr. Laffite, and what he is particularly desirous of ascertaining, is the practicability of establishing, under the authority of the Government of B. A., a regularly organized court of admiralty in any place or island which he might take from the Spaniards on the coast of the Spanish main, or on that of any other part of South America.

It has not been possible to ascertain what was the answer of Mr. Laforest.

Mr. George Graham did not continue his dealings to Jean Lafitte. After the battle of Waterloo and the final fall of the Emperor Napoleon, many of the officers who had served him zealously, and who were not disposed to recognize the sway of the Bourbons, had sought a place of refuge in North America. Among others there was General Lallemand, who, in companionship with some of his former comrades in arms, had established himself

on the Trinity River, in Texas. George Graham had been instructed by the President to proceed to that spot and ascertain what were the plans and the doings of the French General. Graham acted in conformity to his orders, but when he reached the point where it was rumored that a French settlement had been made, he found out that it was deserted, and was informed that Lallemand had gone to Galveston. It was then that he repaired to that locality, and on the 26th of August, 1818, wrote to Jean Lafitte the letter which we have transcribed in these pages. On the same day he addressed to General Lallemand this communication:

Sir: Though convinced, from what has passed in the interviews which I have had the honor to have with you, that you have no interest in the privateering establishment which has been made at this place and that there is no connection between yourself and the persons interested in that establishment, except such as has been imposed upon you by circumstances, it is nevertheless a duty imposed upon me by the instructions of my government to call upon you for an explicit avowal of the national authority, if any, by which you, with the persons under your immediate command, have taken possession of this place, and also to make known to you that the Government of the United States, claiming under the treaty with France by which the colony of Louisiana was ceded with all the country between the Sabine and the Rio Bravo del Norte, will permit no permanent establishment whatsoever to be made within these limits under any authority other than its own.

I have the honor to be, with great consideration and respect, your obedient servant.

General Lallemand proved as pliant as Lafitte had showed himself, and, like him, gave up whatever designs he had entertained as to a settlement at Galveston. He ended his career in obscurity and penury, if we are correctly informed, in the State of New Jersey, after having married in Philadelphia a niece of the famous merchant, Stephen Girard, to whom that city is indebted for the magnificent educational institution in monumental marble which bears the name of its founder.

As to the Lafittes, it is not known to this day what became of them. Probably they carried into execution their plan of going to Buenos Ayres, or else to some other portion of South America.

With regard to the United States, by their treaty of 1819 with Spain for the cession of Florida, they gave up their claims to Texas shortly after they had expelled the two Lafittes and General Lallemand by virtue of these very claims. Hence the Mexicans, having triumphed over the Spaniards in their war of independence, profited by that re-

nunciation and remained in peaceful possession of Texas until they were, in their turn, driven away by the American settlers under the command of General Houston, and the independence of the latter recognized by the United States. Otherwise they might have fared as unsuccessfully in their aspirations as the American settlers who, in 1810, drove the Spaniards from Baton Rouge and the adjacent district known as "West Florida," proclaimed themselves independent, and sought in vain as such to be annexed to the United States, with the privilege of retaining as their property all the public lands. These pretensions were barred by the objection that the United States had never abandoned their claims to the territory in question acquired by virtue of the treaty of cession of Louisiana in 1803, although the Spaniards had been suffered to remain in possession while negotiations were still pending on the disputed subject between the contending parties.*

*It gives me pleasure to acknowledge that I am indebted to General G. Mason Graham, of the parish of Rapides, Louisiana, for the documents used in this article.

[Ed. Note: This article was originally published in The Southern Bivouac, Vol. II, No. 3 (August, 1886), pp. 176-178. The Graham-Laffite letters are preserved in the Library of Congress, Department of State MSS (Special Agents), Washington, D. C.]

AN ACCOUNT OF LAFFITE'S FORMER CREWMEN IN 1850

Edited by Frederick J. Stielow

The romantic allure of the Laffite brothers has attracted writers from Major A. Lacarriere Latour and his Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana (1816) to current members of the Laffite Study Group. A few of the early commentators were fortunate enough to interview retired Baratarians privateers and smugglers in person. The following are excerpts from an account published in the New Orleans Daily Crescent on September 7, 1850, and contain some interesting views from the men who returned to Barataria after the Battle of New Orleans.

Grand Terre Island, August 25, 1850

Eds. Crescent: Induced by the sultry heat of an August sun to exchange for a while a residence on the banks of the Mississippi for a visit to the shores of the Gulf, we embarked one quiet evening in a fine whale-boat . . . After a fatiguing row against a heavy wind and strong tide, we crossed the bay of Barataria about ten miles wide, and were soon laying our cramped limbs in the tiny waves which wash the sands of Grand Terre Island. This place was the rendezvous of the famous Pirate of the Gulf --the archetype of Byron's celebrated Corsair. Here memory and imagination soon hurry you into the mysterious shadows of the past, vainly endeavoring to glean further knowledge of this singular character . . .

Knowing personally several individuals who were engaged as contrabandists in the service of Lafitte, information has been frequently obtained relative to his operation on this island. He is represented as of small stature, reserved in his manner, and not naturally inclined to cruelty. He passed much of his time ashore, attending to the transmission of such articles as were brought in by his cruisers; and from his perfect familiarity with the geography of this district, visiting the city at frequent intervals and at no risk of detention. His want of ferocity was, however, made up for in the blood thirsty nature of his lieutenant, called by my informant Vingt-Cinq [Vincent] Gambi--whom they represent as of hideous countenance, and delighting in acts of cruelty . . . This monster, he says, however, met a fate he richly merited--being killed in an attack on one of his own men, who had given him some offence.

About two or three years ago there lived an old man here, by the name of Feefee [Eagle or Aigle], who openly admitted his connection with Lafitte's party. He lived in a state of primeval simplicity, in a small hut, with two wives and their broods . . . The old fellow used to say that the point of land near his house was the place of which Vingt-Cinq Gambi made his prisoners walk the plank--the water there being very deep. Yesterday we rowed over the spot, and, as our little craft danced over the sea, the low murmurs of the ocean waves seemed to sing the requiem of these departed spirits. Another of his adherents (named Ringo [Francois Rigaud]) is now living about four miles from this place on the island of Grand Isle. He can furnish numerous legends of Lafitte's exploits--and from some source has acquired an independence of \$25,000 or \$30,000 . . . Another of Lafitte's men (whose dexter paw I have often shaken) lived in my vicinity on the river; but, alas! Although he braved bullets and breakers that ruthless scourge, the Cholera, has gathered him to his fathers. Before his door an iron swivel stood, and on his wall hung a handsome sword . . . But peace to his manes; the gay spirit is fled, and the grassy turf now covers all that remains of "Vieux Jimmy."

. . . With its labyrinth of lakes and bayous this is certainly a great district for smuggling; once within the bayous I would defy detection from all the officers of New Orleans.

. . . But I am at the end of my paper, and must bid you good night. Yours, etc.

PORPOISE.

JEAN LAFFITE'S PLAN TO BETRAY THE LALLEMAND EXPEDITION:
FELIPE FATIO'S REPORT, JUNE 27, 1818

Translated by John V. Clay
Edited by Robert C. Vogel

Confidential(1)

Most Excellent Senior:

Don Juan Lafita who has just arrived from Galveston and with whom we have had a secret conference in the house of the Reverend Padre Sedella(2) has given us in detail what he has seen at that place relative to the expedition of General Frances Lallemand(3) and of his statements concerning which we hasten to bring to the attention of Your Excellency.

Before going into detail we believe ourselves to be obligated to remind your Excellency that the expressed Lallemand is one of the talented men by whom Bonaparte was served for his principal intrigues in the times of terror and who was assigned to Dinamarca where he played the same role as Junot in Portugal, Bernadotte in Suecia, La Forest in Russia, and because of the same it seems to us necessary to remind Your Excellency of the regrettable consequences that may result from the presence of such a fearful man on the frontiers of His Majesty in this part of the world and the necessity of stopping his expedition at its beginning.

Don Juan Lafita (alias No. 13) says that the lack of supplies for the expedition at present and the lack of maintaining his maritime connection forces this General to bind himself with him in a friendship sincere in appearance.

He began by declaring his peaceful views. It was planned to form an establishment at the place that would offer the greatest security for the refuge of the unfortunate French who were accompanying him and others that were hoping for conditions different from those of Europe and America. This declaration was supported by the eloquence that was natural to him and demonstrated at the same time that by being in accord with our government in order to form a barrier against the ambitious aims of the United States he was only fearful of that Republic.

With these and other reasons (No. 13 adds) he deluded him to the point of helping him with some supplies without which he would have dispersed his small army composed of 120 men, all officers of rank and sub-

Muy respetado

*E. C. V.
C. M. C. V.*

*Muy señor mío: 1304. 5572. 2734. 3281.
4059. 3101. 5457. 3731. 115. 2097. 1257. 393.
386. 1940. 8115. 563. 4552. 5458. 281. 525.
4872. 2808. 3939. 3606. 4552. 4003. 4307.
2974. 812. 4678. 3462. 239. 2950. 3101. 1510.
4315. 5269. 4706. 5721. 5492. 322. 239.
3104. 5153. 2496. 4052. 5338. El por me-
mor de 1866. 5457. 2496. 5355. 537. 2921.*

*5338 en aquel punto relativo a la expedición
del General Francisco Lallumani 554. 2097
3614. 4061. 3610. 2933. 973. 6292. 4562.
227. que es apudamur a poner en noticia
de V.E.*

*Entretanto de entrar en vista de este enemigo
de miétre deber el recordar a V.E. que el se-
ñorado Lallumani es uno de los hombres
de talento de que se serva. Bonaparte
gracias a sus principales intrigas en la guerra
de terror y que fue destituido por el a V.E.
namurca. Dado. hizo el mismo por.*

Facsimile reproduction of the first page of Fatio's report to the captain-general. Note the numeric cipher, presumably one of the Spanish diplomatic codes. (Archivo General des Indias, Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 1877)

alterns. Supplied in this manner the group was directed to the place that he believed most fitted and he constructed a fort of sufficient size upon the banks of the Rio Trinity at 11 leagues from its mouth and 15 from Galveston, forming there another establishment [Champ d'Asile].(4)

No. 13 greatly praised Lallemand and his troop. He says that the troop labors with dedication without complaint about the privations that they suffer. These are many and great but the leaders give them such example and inspiration along with the hope of improving their lot that the persuasion is such more than gladness is not seen in the faces of the adventurers in the midst of hunger and privation. He adds that a great treaty has been made with the nearby Indians not only in order that they may supply them with provisions but also to serve them in the communications that he was initiated in Natchitoches and in all the Internal Provinces(5), particularly in the capitol of San Antonio and La Bahia. This statement No. 13 has made to us in the presence of the respectable Padre Sedella and we cannot give less than total belief to it -- as much for assembling the information that we have through other ways as well as the fact that he has always transacted with us in the greatest sincerity and shows us now that he desires to cooperate in the destruction of that gang of adventurers.

The plan that he has proposed to us is simple and if it is carried out in the quickest possible way much blood and money would be saved and many great ills would be nipped in the bud. He says that Lallemand has not been in all of this year in a condition to operate with his forces because of not having gathered together the adequacies for the plan of taking possession of the Internal Provinces. In spite of the fact that daily he received reinforcements he [Laffite] would assemble the ambush on the banks of the Rio Trinidad [Trinity] at a suitable distance from the fort with a party of forty or fifty men. This party would have for its sole purpose the cutting off of the supplies that the Indians bring up the river by taking possession of their canoes, hiding them in the woods and not permitting for any reason that the Indians have communication with the adventurers -- at least as far as possible. By this method they would stop sending their canoes in search of supplies and these being taken from them and from the troop their complete destruction would be attained.

This small operation could not be realized unless it is done along with a pair of schooners and a ship of war in order that they may impede and cut off the resources that General Lallemand might receive through pirates, in which case No. 13 offers to help us. The vessels should be very maneuverable and well provided with launches of little draft in order to approach the mouth of the Trinity with troops that the ship of war must bring. There is no need of a force of 300 or 400 men in order to impede the flight of the enemy by land although No. 13 has assured us that Lallemand does not have an understanding with the American government and that on the contrary he shows a great contempt for it and its citizens and he does not wish to receive them into his army. We believe that

Lallemand has not been truthful with No. 13.

It is a positive fact that the American government has sent suitable orders, as Your Excellency knows, for taking possession of Amelia Island and of Galveston. It covers this violation of territory with the false pretext of both places being found in the power of adventurers and pirates.

It is a fact that the American flag waves over Amelia Island it is a fact that even in Galveston, as yet, the reasons that oblige this President to send the cited orders no execution has been given to references to this last point and there is not the least probability that they will be given.

Hence it results to our way of thinking that the American government has contented itself with the taking of all of West Florida and part of the east and it delays its conquests for the present until it sees the impression that its Machiavelian conduct makes in Europe. Although on account of this it is in accord with Lallemand abandoning the insurrection in these valuable territories. This plan is intended to be carried out by every imaginable means within its reach.

The taking of Pensacola and of the Fort of the Barrancas by the Americans provides a place farther out where the intriguers will be able to carry out their wiles against our valuable possessions on this sea with much more certainty. While still little attention is paid to the plotters they will be able to arm themselves and to prepare expeditions in it with the silence and secrecy that is nearly impossible in a place of much commerce.

Furthermore because of its nearness to the Tombigbee it is feared that some of the new colonists would be moved to follow the fortune of General Lallemand if unfortunately he is permitted to increase his means.

The second No. 13 [Jean Laffite] leaves today for Galveston to join the first No. 13 [Pierre Laffite] to await the reply of Your Excellency and to bring over to his side the people necessary to his action for the success of the enterprise that they propose. If the expedition can be carried to an end after that in the space of one month or six weeks it will be so much better in the contrary case. No. 13 says he will agree [that] it may be suspended until after the equinox in September in order to avoid the heavy blows from the southeast which are in the habit of happening in that part of the sea and without having protection he says that under the last condition the expedition would be more successful because it would be possible to convene with the Viceroy of New Spain to whom we transcribe this official letter and to whom Your Excellency will be able to communicate your decision about the particular affair in order to proceed in agreement in an undertaking that not only secures our frontiers in this part of the world but will free the Mexican Sea of the pirates that infest it and will take away all hope from the later adventurers of

attaining their harmful intentions and we must add that the Nos. 13 hope that they will not see themselves afterward exposed and abandoned to the greatest dangers that threaten them more and more each day because of the reasons that the comprehension of Your Excellency will not fail to understand.

With these reasons we offer ourselves to the disposition of Your Excellency and pray that God guard your life many years. New Orleans. June 27, 1818. Most Excellent Senor Luis Noeli, Secretary of the Legation of His Majesty in the United States -- Felipe Fatio.

- Notes -

(1) Fatio's report to the captain-general, written in collaboration with Noeli, was composed in cipher (see illustration, page 17). The original MS is located in the Archivo General de Indias, Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 1877 (Seville).

(2) Fray Antonio de Sedella, cure at Saint Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, was the unofficial and secret representative of the Spanish king in Louisiana. See Stanley Faye, "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXIII (1940), and Harris Gaylord Warren, The Sword Was Their Passport (Baton Rouge, 1943), 131, 137.

(3) Charles Francois Antoine Lallemand and his brother, Henri Lallemand, were general officers in the army of Napoleon before coming to the United States in the summer of 1816. For background information on the ill-fated Lallemand filibuster, see Hartmann et Millard, Le Texas, au Notice Historique sur le Champ D'Asile (Paris, 1819), Louis Francois L'Heritier, Le Champ-D'Asile, Tableau Topographique et Historique Du Texas (1819) and Warren, op. cit.

(4) Champ D'Asile was located near the present site of Wallisville, Texas.

(5) The interior provinces of New Spain: Texas, New Mexico, Upper and Lower California, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Nuevo Santander.

THE LAFFITE STUDY GROUP:
CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

CONSTITUTION

Article I.

Name

The name of this organization shall be the Laffite Study Group, Inc.

Article II.

Purpose

The purpose of the Laffite Study Group, Inc., shall be to bring together those people interested in Jean Laffite's role in American history, folklore, and literature.

The study group's principal function will be to encourage original research and facilitate greater communication among researchers. It will publish a Newsletter and a journal, The Life and Times of Jean Laffite.

Article III.

Membership

Membership in the study group shall be of five classes:

1. Individual active members, defined as any person interested in the purposes or activities of the Laffite Study Group.
2. Institutional members.
3. Sustaining members, defined as a person, group, or institution offering special support for the objectives of the study group.
4. Honorary members, to be elected by a majority vote of the board of directors.

5. Life members (individual only).

Article IV.

Officers and Board of Directors

The officers of the Laffite Study Group, Inc., shall be a president, a vice-president, and a secretary-treasurer, who shall be elected for a term of two years.

The board of directors shall consist of not more than seven voting members appointed by the president of the study group for a term of three years.

Article V.

Election of Officers

All officers shall be elected by a plurality of mail ballots cast by eligible active members and tabulated by the secretary-treasurer at least one month before the terms of those in office are scheduled to expire. The election results shall be ratified by the board of directors, following which those persons certified as elected shall be considered the officers of the Laffite Study Group.

Not less than two months prior to the mailing of ballots, the board of directors will nominate candidates for each office. Nominations may also be made by any member of the study group at any time prior to balloting.

To be eligible for election, a candidate shall be an individual, sustaining, or life member of the Laffite Study Group.

Article VI.

Amendment

This constitution may be amended at any general meeting of the study group by a two-thirds vote of those voting, provided notice was published in the LSG Newsletter before the meeting. Or it may be amended by a unanimous vote of the study group officers and board of directors, with notice of the intention to amend the constitution published before the vote. All proposed amendments shall be submitted to the secretary-treasurer in writing.

BY-LAWS

Article I.

Membership and Dues

Membership in the Laffite Study Group shall be open to all persons interested in research and the publication of studies in various fields which contribute to a greater knowledge and understanding of Jean Laffite's place in American history, folklore, and literature.

Active membership shall date from the receipt by the secretary-treasurer of the annual dues and shall continue so long as such annual dues are paid. Any member whose dues are in arrears for one year may be dropped from the rolls of the study group.

Annual dues for all classes of membership shall be determined by the board of directors.

Only active members in good standing shall be able to vote or hold office in the Laffite Study Group.

Article II.

Duties of the Officers and Directors

The president shall have executive supervision over the activities of the study group within the scope provided by these by-laws. He shall preside at all meetings of the study group membership. He shall appoint directors and committee chairmen.

The vice-president shall assume the duties of the president in the event of absence, incapacity, or resignation of the president.

The secretary-treasurer shall be responsible for the safekeeping of study group funds and for maintaining adequate financial records. The secretary-treasurer will collect dues and deposit all monies received by the study group with a reliable banking company in the name of the Laffite Study Group. He shall render annually a financial report and a list of current study group members.

The board of directors shall consist of not more than seven persons, and not less than five persons, appointed by the president for a term of three years. The board of directors shall have the power to conduct all affairs of the study group. It shall nominate candidates for office, pursuant to the constitution, and appoint the editorial staff of the LSG Newsletter and The Life and Times of Jean Laffite. The board of directors shall decide questions of policy that for any reason cannot be acted upon at a

meeting of the general membership.

The charter members of the Laffite Study Group shall select an "executive board" of not more than seven members to transact the necessary business of the board of directors until 1 September, 1982. At that time, the acting president of the Laffite Study Group shall designate two appointees to serve on the board of directors for a term of one year; two appointees to serve a term of two years; and three appointees to serve a term of three years. All subsequent appointments shall be for a term of three years. In the event of a vacancy on the board, the vacancy shall be filled by an appointee serving a term of three years. Members of the board of directors shall continue to hold office until their successors have been appointed.

At any meeting of the board of directors, three members shall constitute a quorum. Proxy voting at board meetings shall be permitted.

Article III.

Schedule and Quorum for Meetings

Meetings of the general membership of the Laffite Study Group may be called by the president.

The board of directors shall meet at least twice each year. The annual meeting of the board of directors shall be called by the chairman of the board in the spring of the year.

One-third of the active members of the study group shall constitute a quorum for a meeting of the general membership.

Article IV.

Amendment

These by-laws may be amended at any meeting of the general membership by a majority vote of the members in attendance, provided notice was published in the LSG Newsletter before the meeting. Or the by-laws may be amended at a special meeting of the study group officers and board of directors by a unanimous vote, with notice of the intention to amend the by-laws published in the LSG Newsletter before the meeting. At the discretion of the board of directors, amendments may be circulated among the study group membership and a mail canvass conducted to ascertain members' approval or disapproval of a proposed amendment.

AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS
OF THE LAFFITE STUDY GROUP

The Life and Times of Jean Laffite

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1976 Number 1 | Out of Print |
| "The Journals of Jean Laffite" | |
| John L. Howells | |
| "Laffite Bibliography" | |
| Robert C. Vogel | |
| 1976 Number 2 | \$3.00 plus postage & handling |
| "Southern Barataria in the Era of Jean Laffite" | |
| Frederick J. Stielow | |
| 1977 Number 3 | \$8.75 plus postage & handling |
| "Renato Beluche" | |
| Jane L. DeGrummond | |
| "Selections from the Lafitte Book" | |
| Robert C. Vogel | |
| 1978 Number 4 | \$2.50 plus postage & handling |
| "Filibusters on the Lower Trinity" | |
| John V. Clay | |
| 1980 Number 5 | \$2.50 plus postage & handling |
| "Contemporary Descriptions of Jean Laffite" | |
| John L. Howells | |
| "The Houma Indians and Jean Laffite" | |
| Janel Curry | |
| 1982 Number 6 | \$5.00 plus postage & handling |
| "The Short Life of Dominique You" | |
| Lionel Bienvenue | |
| "The Famous Lafittes at Galveston" | |
| Charles Gayarre | |

LTJL Reprints

| | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| 1979 Number 1 | \$5.00 plus postage |
|---------------|---------------------|

SUGGESTIONS TO CONTRIBUTORS

Articles, reports, documents and research notes are solicited and will be accepted for publication in The Life and Times of Jean Laffite in accordance with standards and policies established by the directors of the Laffite Study Group. Abstracts of published work may be accepted.

Contributors are reminded that their work will be read by an audience of widely varied backgrounds. Manuscripts should be type-written and double-spaced, with footnotes and references at the end and also double-spaced. The Managing Editor reserves the right to make minor corrections and adjustments in materials accepted for publication by the publications committee. Manuscripts will not be returned.

The use of maps and photographs is encouraged. Illustrations should be clear, well-drafted, with captions, as well as proportioned for reduction to printed page size. Maps should not be folded.

Each contributor will receive four copies of the issue in which his material appears at no cost. Additional copies may be purchased at current prices listed. No payment will be made for any material published.

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Birmingham, Alabama

Vice-President

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