

The Laffite Study Group Newsletter

Volume V No. 2 Summer 1985

The Laffite Study Group was formed in 1975 to unite persons with an interest in Jean Laffite's role in history, folklore, and literature. A non-profit educational organization, the study group publishes this **Newsletter** and a series of occasional papers entitled **The Life and Times of Jean Laffite**. Membership in the LSG is open to all. Annual dues are \$10 for individuals and libraries (\$15 outside the U.S.), \$200 for life memberships. Queries concerning membership dues, subscriptions, etc., should be addressed to the Secretary-Treasurer, 2570 Kevin Lane, Houston, Texas 77043.

LEGEND OF LAFFITE IS ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE An Editorial

From a brochure distributed by the National Park Service's JLNHP office in New Orleans:

"The park is named for Jean Lafitte, a well known resident of Louisiana from 1803 to 1818. From his remote harbor and headquarters on Barataria Bay Lafitte led as many as five thousand 'Baratarians' in privateering and smuggling, which were common means of doing business then. Through arms, ammunition, and men Lafitte helped the American forces in the victory over the British in 1815."

I suppose we shall have to get used to the Park Service's use of the aglicized surname, but must we endure such historical mush as this, dished up under the rubric of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park? Some historians have placed Jean Laffite's arrival in Louisiana around the date of the Louisiana Purchase, but I am at a loss for any rationale supportive of the year 1818 as the terminal date for Laffite's connection with Louisiana. Certainly, both Laffites commuted between Galveston and New Orleans, at least up until the date they abandoned their Texas establishment, which was in late 1820 or early 1821. There is no credible evidence to suggest a 5000-man contingent of Baratarian smugglers and privateers -- hardly anyone puts the number at more than a thousand. I would also challenge the statement that privateering and smuggling were "common" business activities in Laffite's New Orleans.

If you are as miffed as I am by the Park Service's treatment of the historical Jean Laffite, then you may wish to write to the superintendent: Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, Room 206, U.S. Custom House, 423 Canal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70130.

SHIP'S HISTORIES: USS LYNX

USS **Lynx**, a six-gun Baltimore Clipper rigged schooner of 150 tons, was built for the Navy by James Owner of Georgetown, Washington, D.C., in 1814, intended for service as a commerce raider. The War of 1812 ended before the schooner was commissioned, however **Lynx** was placed in service and sailed with Commodore William Bainbridge's squadron in the Mediterranean. Arriving too late to see action in the war against the Barbary pirates, **Lynx** returned to American waters and conducted a survey of the northeastern coast in 1817. Following this duty, **Lynx** joined the West Indies squadron and patrolled against pirates. In the fall of 1819, under the command of Lieutenant J. R. Madison, **Lynx** cruised off the Texas coast, making prizes of several "pirates" based at Galveston. The schooner put in at Galveston Island and her captain was briefly in contact with Jean Laffite, who was making preparations to abandon the Texas coast. At the end of the year **Lynx** returned to St. Mary's, Georgia, from which port she departed on 11 January 1820 bound for Kingston, Jamaica. She was never seen or heard from again.

(This article was compiled from records in the Naval History Center and the National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C.)

THE LAFFITE NETWORK

Compiled by Robert C. Vogel

"The pirates followed the usual routine," reported the naval officer: "They came up over the fantail, moved up through the superstructure holding anyone they found at knifepoint until they came to the master's cabin, rifled the ship's safe, tied the master up and left." A vignette from the West Indies, ca. 1810? Try the Strait of Malacca in the year 1985. The vessel in question was the **SS Falcon Countess**, a cargo ship under contract to the U.S. Navy, carrying jet fuel and diesel oil from Bahrain to Guam. No one was hurt and the pirates' booty amounted to something less than \$20,000. The Navy now instructs its ships to post a guard when traversing the Strait of Malacca, which separates Singapore and Indonesia. (From an Associated Press wire story.)

A request for information re: Christian Getzendanner:

In a paper on the early German settlements in Maryland presented to the Frederick County Historical Society in 1896,

Edward P. Schultz noted that one of the grandsons of early settler Geztendanner (also spelled Giezendanner, Goetzendanner, Gitzdanner) "was a captain in the Lafitte fleet...but his offence was wiped out by his gallant conduct at the battle of New Orleans." Was there a "Captain Getzendanner" among the Laffite associates at New Orleans or Galveston? If anyone has come across a reference to this individual, please write to: Mrs. Martha Schunke Lynch, 7516 Stewart Road, Galveston, TX 77551.

I recently ran across two interesting testimonials to Jean Laffite's contribution to the American victory at the Battle of New Orleans:

"Lafete [sic] has joined the American army at Orleans, for which gen. Jackson is to obtain forgiveness for him from the government...for all his misconduct. He furnished 800 muskets and 3 or 400 soldiers;; it is said they are very brave men." Letter from Mr. Maclot, a St. Louis resident writing from New Orleans, in the St. Louis **Missouri Gazette & Illinois Advertiser** of 4 February 1815.

"I [have] informed you of Lafitte, the famous smuggler and pirate, having joined our forces. They have been of great value, and distinguished themselves; as did the free people of colour. Indeed, it has proven fortunate circumstances that they were enrolled in our army." Anonymous letter from New Orleans in the **Charleston Courier** of 20 February 1915.

The Louisiana Historical Association's annual meeting will be held in Shreveport in March of 1986. The program committee is now receiving proposals for papers and sessions. Is anyone interested in a Laffite session, or some kind of informal meeting of Laffite aficionados concurrent with the LHA meeting?

Pam Keyes has resigned as editor of the **LSG Newsletter**. Robert C. Vogel, managing editor of **The Life and Times of Jean Laffite**, will assume editorial responsibility for the Newsletter ad interim. Please address all manuscripts, reviews, queries, etc., to:

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