

THE LAFFITE SOCIETY

Meridian Retirement Center, 2228 Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77550

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 08, 2011

Board Members Present: President Ed Jamison, FVP Jack Watson, SVP Kathy Modzelewski, TVP Ginny Roberts, Secretary Carolyn Peterson, Treasurer Jeff Modzelewski, Technology Director Rob Peterson, Editor Dan Cote, Publicity Director Dave Roberts, Archivist Larry Porter, Parliamentarian Diane Olson

Board Members Absent: Coordinator of Research Pam Keyes

Advisory Board Present: Jean Epperson, Jeff Modzelewski, Kathy Modzelewski, Dale Olson

Advisory Board Absent: Pam Keyes, Robert Vogel, Dr. Reginald Wilson

The meeting was called to order at 6:41PM. President Ed Jamison welcomed the following visitors: Allison and John Christenson, Larry and Bobbette Brasfield, Jack McCoy, Jim Saye, Michael Wohio, Barbara Greb, Betsy and Les Horner, Dale Carter, Matt Davis, Juan Mugartegou, Trish Carly and Mia Cummings, Kathy Hitchcock and Steve Austin (visiting from Portland, OR), Connie and Frank Dryden, Suzanne McClure and Debbie Morris.

Kathy Modzelewski is recruiting volunteers to help with the Red Cross Kettle donation drive. She reminded the group to donate to the kitty to defray costs for the delicious meals that Ginny Roberts provides for our meetings.

Lynette Haaga said that the invitations for the Winter Banquet are in the mail. The date is December 11 at the Trolley Station and the tickets are \$50 per person. Entertainment will be provided by Dr. Stephen Curley with the topic being sea chanteys.

Program Speaker – R. Dale Olson

Topic – The Maison Rouge of Jean Laffite

SVP Jack Watson introduced Dale as one of the original founders and past president of the Society. Dale was a professional musician having worked for Disney Studios for over twenty years and is an expert in brass instrument design and performance.

Dale and Diane have owned the Maison Rouge site since 1991, but consider themselves as its custodians. They have received much help and support over the years from many of the members of the Society such as Ed Jamison, Dorothy Mc Donald Karilanovic, Lou McBeth Olson, Bill and Bernadette Foley, Kathy and Jeff Modzelewski, Dave and Ginny Roberts, Sheldon Kendall, and Jean Epperson. He singled out Jim Nonus as being his biggest supporter in this endeavor.

Dale said that there are two kinds of legends regarding the Maison Rouge. One is that it is haunted and the other that the property contains buried treasure. He gave three instances of supposed hauntings. Douglas Zwiener owned the property before the Olsons and he reported strange happenings which were never substantiated. In 1907 Anne Peterson lived there and had to move out because of the ghosts of pirates, she said. More recently the Society held a Halloween séance and one of our members went into a trance speaking a language that no one understood including herself.

Laffite left the area in 1820 and in less than a year treasure hunters descended on the site, finding nothing, but the search for treasure was continuous after 1822. In 1836 the hunting paused because a sunken Spanish ship was uncovered and mistaken for Laffite's treasure ship. But that didn't last long and the treasure frenzy continues into the present.

Before there was a Maison Rouge Luis Aury came to Galveston, but he had difficulties in making landfall, crashing several ships. He finally made it in and created some sort of establishment on the island. After him came Francisco Mina and the two of them left Galveston together. Mina

went to Mexico to fight against the Spanish, but was caught and executed. Aury returned to Galveston where he found Laffite and again left the island. Bartholemey Lafon (a man of various and considerable talents) arrived at Galveston on the Carmelita loaded with building materials. He was possibly the architect of the Maison Rouge.

Avocational historian, Ann Brindley, believes that the Maison Rouge site was the location of Samuel Bangs' first printing press in Texas, the first ice house in Texas, and the first hotel. Dale said he did not necessarily accept all of her theories. Amassa Turner built an ice house around the location, but had to give up the timbers for another development. Even though Laffite burned the house when he left, timbers were still reported being seen as late as 1842. Dale showed some old maps dating from 1828 showing a fort and house -- possibly the Maison Rouge. In 1838 Juan Sequin obtained land around the Maison Rouge site and built a hotel there and General Sam Houston and a group came and stayed there getting a bill of \$443.00 for dinner, bar, and rooms. Peter Minard bought the site in 1840 and, with other business men, formed the Galveston City Company. The Maison Rouge site then passed through many hands before finally being sold to Frederick William Hendricks in 1866. Hendricks built the "Hendricks Castle" that towered over the smaller houses around it. The question is whether Hendricks Castle was a copy of the Maison Rouge. Dale gave several reasons why this could be the case -- one was that at the time there were still people living from the Laffite era that could be used for reference. Also, the seal of Campeche (crossed anchors) used by Laffite is visible on both sides of the stairs on the Hendricks house. After the deaths of the Hendricks couple, the executor (a man Capt. Hendricks had rescued and nursed back to health) ran the estate into the ground. After he died the courts took over management of the estate valued at \$89.27 in 1922. In 1937 W. L. Moody bought the property, but didn't pay the taxes. It was eventually sold to Abe Jacobson, but fell into greater disrepair. In 1952 the fire department forced its demolition. Douglas Zwiener bought the property in 1962 and installed the historical marker in 1965. He had hoped to build a restaurant on the site. In 1991 Diane Olson gave it to Dale for Father's Day.

The first reference to the house being called "Maison Rouge" was by an English writer living in Galveston named William Bollaert in 1840-1842.

Questions:

What about the new cottages on the east side of the site? They are not new and the person who owns the property lets visiting researchers stay there. ***Why didn't W.L. Moody pay taxes being that he was very wealthy?*** No answer was given.

Wasn't there a plate discovered there that has since disappeared? Yes, it was taken by a UH grad student. ***Was the property affected by the grade raising of 1900?*** It stopped one alley to the east. ***Was one wall knocked down by Ike?***

The eastern wall was knocked down by the storm. ***When you returned the unwanted items removed in a dig to the site, did you include a note?*** Yes, but I am not going to tell you what it says (laughter).



Dale said that Suzanne McClure has a collection of oral interviews with her Aunt, Mrs. Cortes Pauls, regarding the digs at the site.

Miscellaneous

Ed asked Joyce McLane about the Pirate Museum to see if it is open and she said it should be ready for Dickens on the Strand.

Ed welcomed back Ann and Harry Forester along with Alicia and Jesse Dunne.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:31PM.

Submitted by Carolyn Peterson
Corresponding/Recording Secretary