

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JEAN LAFFITE

NEWSLETTER OF THE LAFFITE STUDY GROUP • P. O. BOX 44 • COTTAGE GROVE, MINNESOTA 55016

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EDITORIAL

LTJL is back.

It has been a long time since The Life and Times of Jean Laffite has made its way to your mailbox. We are sorry about that. We could start to make excuses, but we aren't going to do that; we're going to tell the truth. We cannot afford to publish both a quarterly newsletter and a collection of occasional papers. Six regular issues and a special reprint volume of the old LTJL were published between 1975 and 1982. Unfortunately, LTJL was expensive to print and distribute as an annual or semi-annual publication, and as costs increased over the years, it became necessary to find some other means for the LSG to publish the product of its members' research. In 1980, the LSG started publishing a quarterly newsletter. The decision to discontinue LTJL as a collection of occasional papers and reinstate it as the official study group publication in the format of an expanded quarterly newsletter was made by the LSG board of directors earlier this year.

With this issue, the Laffite Study Group Newsletter becomes the new Life and Times of Jean Laffite. You will already have noticed that this is the first issue in Volume IX and marks the tenth year of publishing a LSG newsletter. The new LTJL is bigger -- we've gone from four to eight pages so that we can include longer articles and use more pictures, documents, maps, etc. -- and, we hope, better than the old newsletter.

Please write. The Laffite Study Group was organized in 1975 for the purpose of uniting persons interested in Jean Laffite's role in American history, literature and folklore. We created the Life and Times of Jean Laffite to promote communication among persons interested in the life and times of Jean Laffite. The subject is often controversial; we encourage you to write to continue the discussion.

Robert C. Vogel, Editor

DOMINIQUE YOUNG AND LA SUPERBE

by Sylvie Feuillie

Among the documents relating to French maritime history preserved in the Archives Nationales in Paris is a series (FF₃, "Jugement de prises") dedicated to privateering, including official minutes of proceedings and reports of the prize courts in Guadeloupe and other West Indian ports. The name of Dominique Youx appears as a French corsair in late 1805 and 1806.

Looking at the document reproduced on the opposite page, we see that Dominique Youx was captain of *La Superbe*, armed as a privateer by M. Jacques Plaideau. His prizes were the brigantine *Jane*, the schooner *Eliza* and the schooner *Eleonor*. All of these were American ships, condemned by the prize court in Basseterre, Guadeloupe, and sold in Cuba. Youx operated with another French corsair, Victor Lesage, to capture the *Eleonor*. (It was not exceptional for two or three corsairs to claim one prize.) Note also the prize *María Mischief* taken by the corsair *Le Regulateur*, commanded by [Jean? Pierre? Louis?] Lafitte.

Dominique Youx' name does not appear in the Guadeloupe archives after 1806, but we find a lot of information about him and his ship in an official register sent by the Santo Domingo authorities to the French ministry of marine. This register collects the minutes of proceedings from January 1806 to June 1808 and is part of the same Guadeloupe papers as above.

In September 1806t, Youx declared to the authorities in Santo Domingo, where a prize court was established, that his ship *La Superbe* had sunk after a naval engagement (the name of the enemy ship does not appear), preventing the captain and crew from presenting to the prize court the papers of *La Superbe's* two prizes, the *La Vipre* and the *Exchange*; the papers had gone down with the ship.

According to the proceedings of the prize court, we learn that (1) Youx lost his ship in October 1806; (2) that he lived in Baracoa, Cuba (or at least he had a house there: the document noted that he and his officers escaped from the disaster to his house in Baracoa); and (3) that he did not know how to sign his name (this information is clearly written in the margin of the document). The case of the American schooner *La Vipre* of Baltimore was heard on 15 December 1806. She was declared as being a lawful prize since she was boarded not far from Santo Domingo. By that time, Dominique Youx and other corsairs based in the northern Caribbean were hailing American and Swedish ships which were suspected of making illegal trading voyages to the rebels in French Santo Domingo or were on slave trading voyages from Africa. Youx sent his prizes to Cuba, to be sold in Baracoa as soon as they could be declared lawful prizes by a French court. Such courts, dedicated to judging the prizes of corsairs, were established in Basse-Terre and Santo Domingo.

Etant lemmanté des Prises faites par les Corsaires de la Madeloupe et Condammés par la Commission des Prises de la Babeloupe, pendant le Premier-traité de l'Equateur, Mil huit Cent Six-...

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NEWS & NOTES

We were saddened to learn of the passing of Jean Lafitte Howells, wife of LSG co-founder John Howells of Houston, Texas, who died suddenly on 22 March 1989. Mrs. Howells, a registered nurse, was a descendant of John B. Lafitte, the famous New Orleans merchant and Civil War blockade runner.

Pierre Rameau, aka the "King of Honey Island," is the subject of an article in the March 1989 issue of New Orleans Magazine, "New Orleans' Mysterious 'Other' Pirate," by Paul F. Stahls, Jr. Rameau was the leader of a gang of bandits called the Chat-Huants (Screech Owls), who inhabited the Honey Island Swamp between the Pearl and West Pearl Rivers, a little above modern-day Slidell, during the early 1800's. Like Laffite, Rameau is one of those mysterious shaddows which cross the pages of Louisiana history.

Advocates of the authenticity of the "Journal of Jean Laffite" may find Gregory Curtis' article, "Forgery Texas Style" (Texas Monthly, March 1989), unsettling. A number of Texas rare documents dealers, including C. Dorman David, John Jenkins and William Simpson, sold fakes of the 1836 Texas Declaration of Independence and other "rare" documents to libraries and collectors across the country. David admitted to making the forgeries, which he peddled to other dealers, who passed them along to their customers as authentic Texana. Johnny Jenkins (recently found murdered on the bank of Lake Travis near Austin) and Bill Simpson, it will be noted, were the dealers who acquired the Laffite Journal collection (now installed in the Sam Houston Regional History Center at Liberty) from John A. Lafitte in 1969.

Ghost stories tie Jean Laffite to the historic Destrahan Manor in St. Charles Parish, Louisiana, which will celebrate its bicentennial in 1990. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, Destrahan is the oldest intact plantation house in the Mississippi Valley. The German Coast plantation home has been preserved and restored by the River Road Historical Society and is open for tours.

Writing in the free weekly Lagniappe ("something extra for Southwest Louisiana"), Jim Bradshaw tells the story about a headless British soldier killed at the Battle of New Orleans who haunts the Devil Flats below New Orleans. The "Zombi of Batture Du Diable" lost his head to chain shot fired from Fort St. Philip, one of the positions manned by Baratarian "marines" serving in Jackson's army. "Since the beginning," writes Bradshaw, "there has been an understanding between the soldier and the people on the east side of the river. He walks upriver at the close of the day. Later, when everyone's asleep, he treats downriver again. He leaves the people alone. They leave him alone." One night, though, a drunken local interrupted the zombi dawn patrol and offered him a drink, whereupon the old redcoat gave Mr. Remy a whack upside the head.

We see that Frances Frank Marcus, a New Orleans writer, has published a piece entitled "Canoeing Among Alligators" in the Sunday New York Times (15 January 1989) describing moonlight canoe trips offered by the National Park Service along the bayous Cocquille and Des Familles in the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park.

The following wire story appeared on page 33 of the Houston Post (12 January 1989): "Tucson, Ariz. (AP) -- Irene DuVal-Lewis, a granddaughter of President Benjamin Harrison who also was said to be a niece of the French pirate Jean Lafitte, has died at a nursing home here. She was 105...Mrs. DuVal-Lewis' great-niece, Kathryn Duval, attributed her aunt's longevity to 'her spunk' and said she felt her great-aunt's kinship with Lafitte was more fascinating than the presidential connection..."

Robert Vogel presented a paper, "Jean Laffite, the Baratarians and the Historical Geography of Piracy in the Gulf of Mexico," at the 12th Gulf Coast History Conference, in Mobile, Alabama. LSG President Sir Jack D. L. Holmes also presented a paper at the conference, entitled, "Point and Counterpoint: Piracy, Privateers and the Spanish Coast Guard, 1780-1821."

The Sunday 12 March 1989 edition of the Lake Charles American Press included a full-page article by Nola Mae Wittler Ross, "Jean Lafitte: Pirate: Privateer: Patriot," containing a lively mix of history and legend.

The Brethren of the Coast, which describes itself as an "exciting new club for everyone interested in pirates, pirate movies and the lore of the sea," is offering charter memberships. The Brethren publish the magazine Jolly Roger and a bi-monthly newsletter, Night Watch. In the words of club mascot Blinky Bill, "don't be a lubber, be a brother," by sending check or money order for \$15, payable to Larry Byrd, to Brethren of the Coast, 4054 Wade St., #6, Los Angeles, CA 90066.

Mitchell/Southwest has developed two new beachfront communities, called Pirates' Cove and Pirates' Beach, on West Galveston Island. Lots in the new Pirates' Beach, described as "the perfect place to while away some well-deserved leisure time--or to spend a lifetime," may include part of the Three Trees battlefield, where Jean Laffite and his Galvestoneers fought the Karankawa Indians in 1818.

Pirates' namesakes appear in the strangest places. The second towboat of this navigation season on the Upper Mississippi docked at St. Paul around the first of April, having plowed a path through the ice from St. Louis. The tow's name: Dominique You.

GUIDE TO ARTICLES IN THE LSG NEWSLETTER, 1980-1988

"Great Stamp Campaign" by Pam Keyes (Winter 1981).

"Dr. Strangebreed, Or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned To Love Laffite" by Jack D. L. Holmes (Winter 1981).

Review of Hamilton, Great Forgers and Famous Fakes by Pam Keyes (Spring 1981).

"The Journal: Forgery or the Real Thing?" by John L. Howells (Spring 1981).

"An Update on the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park" by Lionel Bienvenue (Summer 1981).

"Hellish Bandit for Gentleman Smuggler?" by Pam Keyes (Fall 1981).

"Controversy Marked 1958 'Buccaneer' Film" (Winter-Spring 1983).

Review of DeGrummond, Renato Beluche: Smuggler, Privateer and Patriot, 1780-1860 by Pam Keyes (Summer-Fall 1983).

"A Visit to Galveston in 1818" by Randall Jones (Spring 1984).

"New Laffite Biography Needed" by Pam Keyes (Summer-Fall 1984).

"'Treasure Trove': Classic Laffite Lore" (Summer-Fall 1984).

"The Best Laffite Lore" by Robert C. Vogel (Winter 1984).

"Ships' Histories: USS Alligator" (Winter 1984).

"The Legend of Laffite is Alive and Well and Living in the National Park Service" by Robert C. Vogel (Summer 1985).

"Ships' Histories: USS Lynx" (Summer 1985).

Vogel, Robert C. Review of Greene, Historic Resource Study: Jean Lafitte National Park and Preserve (Fall-Winter 1985).

"Ships' Histories: USS Firebrand" (Spring 1986).

"Grand Terre in 1844" (Summer 1986).

"Thomas Jefferson Beale and His Treasure" by Robert C. Vogel (Fall 1986).

"Jacinto Lobrano" (Winter 1986).

"The Baratarians vs The United States: A Chronology, 1812-1815" (Spring 1987).

- "Ships' Histories: USS Carolina" (Summer 1987).
- "Laffite Materials in the Rosenberg Library" by Jane A. Kenamore (Fall 1987).
- "A Biographical Sketch of Jacques Laffitte, Banker" by John L. Howells (Winter 1987).
- "Ships' Histories: Privateer Bellona" (Winter 1987).
- "John A. Lafflin and the Journal of Jean Laffite" by Ray and Sue Thompson (pt. 1 Spring 1988; pt. 2 Summer 1988).
- "An Authentic Jean Laffite Letter" (Spring 1988).
- "Pierre Laffite, R.I.P. in Yucatan" (Spring 1988).
- "Genealogical Note: Herman E. Laffitte (1847-1913)" by Robert C. Vogel (Spring 1988).
- "Dr. Formento Makes a House Call to Maison Rouge" (Summer 1988).
- "Lost At Sea: Cassandra Van Pradelles" (Fall-Winter 1988).
- "The Case of the Schooner 'Dos Hermanos'" by Robert C. Vogel (Fall-Winter 1988).

LAFFITE AND TOURISM: A SAMPLER

From materials picked up at information kiosks during a recent trip through Texas and Louisiana --

"From the earliest days of exploration along the Louisiana coast, Grand Isle has figured prominently in state history...The notorious operations of pirates Jean and Pierre Lafitte may have at one time been the main 'industrial' activity on Grand Isle, but business is now centered around the offshore rigs, the shrimp, oyster and fishing boats and the flock of fun-seekers who annually make the island their place in the sun." -- Booklet, "Welcome to Grand Isle Louisiana State Park," published by the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Office of State Parks.

"It is a known fact that he and his brother, Pierre, jointly owned a blacksmith shop in New Orleans and that he often sailed from that city by the way of Bayou Barataria westward to the mouth of the Calcasieu River and even onward to Galveston. It is also known that Lafitte was friendly with the family of Charles Sallier and Arseue LeBleu and sometimes visited them when he was forced to take refuge from the federal gunboats...It is also rumored that Lafitte not only had an eye for fine looking women but also loved the native cooking of this area of Louisiana...Whether it was an interest in one of the ladies in our area or

his love of fine food that kept him coming back to this region, we don't know. We do know, however, that he and his men visited here frequently and buried their treasures somewhere along the bank of the Calcasieu or Contraband Bayou." -- Advertisement for the Jean Lafitte Inn, Harold Guidry, Innkeeper, Lake Charles, Louisiana.

"At the foot of the bridge, on the left, is Lafitte's Landing Restaurant, originally a raised cottage built in 1797. The cottage is said to have been frequented by the pirate Jean Lafitte...Just beyond the university [Nicholls State] is Acadia, considered to have been started by Jim Bowie in 1828 on advice of Jean Lafitte..." -- Tour guide brochure published by the Lafourche Parish Tourist Commission.

"Legendary beliefs instill that Contraband Bayou conceals the most sought-after treasures of famous pirate Jean Lafitte. In the early 1800's, Jean Lafitte sojourned up this mystical waterway to hide his prized contraband. Today, nestled on the banks of these historic waters, Louisianne's Restaurant offers a modern bounty..." -- Flyer for Louisianne's, Lake Charles, Louisiana.

"Hug the coast and you'll find Port Arthur. That's exactly what French privateer, Jean Lafitte did in his romantic, sea-faring days of the early 18th [sic] century...Although the days of pirate ships and Jean Lafitte are gone, the romance and unique beauty of the upper Texas Gulf coast still exists in Port Arthur..." -- Brochure distributed by the Port Arthur, Texas, Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"Niblett's Bluff was used by the Pirate Jean Lafitte in the early 1800's. The many bayous and sloughs of the Sabine and Calcasieu Rivers in 'No Man's Land' were perfect for hiding from the Spanish, French and English ships he plundered. Legend has it that a great treasure is still buried at the site of the '13 Plum Trees.' One of Jean Lafitte's ships sunk north of Niblett's Bluff and the remains could still be seen in the early 1900's...Located overlooking the Sabine River, this parish park is a good place to camp and fish in this area...It is a good place to hunt for Jean Lafitte's buried treasure!" -- From "West Calcasieu's Old Spanish Trail," printed for the Old Spanish Trail Association, Vinton, Louisiana.

The Life and Times of Jean Laffite is published quarterly and distributed to members of the Laffite Study Group. Membership in the LSG is open to all. Annual dues are \$10.00 for individuals and institutions. Applications for membership should be addressed to: John L. Howells, Secretary-Treasurer, Laffite Study Group, 2570 Kevin Lane, Houston, Texas 77043.