

# THE LAFFITE STUDY GROUP NEW LETTER

VOL. I, NO. 4  
Summer, 1981

PAM KEYES  
Editor

## *Calcasieu Parish Police Jury Split Over Laffite Memorial on I-10 Bridge*

Allen August of the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury is upset.

He and some other people don't like the idea of naming the Lake Charles I-10 bridge for Jean Laffite. After all, using Laffite's name on a respectable highway bridge would honor his "acts of piracy and cruelty" as some members of the Police Jury say.

And, according to aforementioned Police Juror August, Laffite "sold his soul to whomever gave him the most money. He would have fought with the British at New Orleans, but they didn't offer him enough money."

Least Laffite fans groan in despair, there

is a silver lining to this latest news item on Laffite; there are people out there who would love to put Laffite's name on the bridge, and some of these persons are members of the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, the group which will have final say over the matter.

Leading jurors in favor of Laffite is Juror D.C. Green, who feels that Laffite's aid at the Battle of New Orleans exonerates him.

However, those in favor of Laffite may have their hopes shot down. According to an Associated Press report published in the New Orleans Times-Pica-

yune, things looked bleak in the way of a bridge-naming. According to Jury President Roger Miller, Laffite appears to be sunk in regards to the Calcasieu Parish Bridge.

As with all good things, hope is never lost, as the related letters on page 3 indicate. With luck, outside interest in a Laffite bridge might sway the vote favorably when the Police Jury make their final decision.

Despite the seeming reticence to honor Laffite, other areas and locales have recognized him recently and in the past: a newly created national historical park, a city in Louisiana and several streets already bear the Laffite name in one or the other of its spellings.

## *Pirates Thrive in Bahamian Haven*

Bahama, favorite vacation spot of the idle rich, is fast becoming a nirvana for pirates once again.

According to Florida boaters, tales of attempted piracy, muggings and bullets-across-the-bow are rampant. The latest episode recounted involved an attempt by men on high-powered speedboats to board several American vessels June 2 at Honeymoon Harbor, south of Bimini.

Bahamian officials say crime is generally riding a flood tide of drugs, illegal aliens and gun-running. No police agency keeps statistics about the number of

boats actually attacked or the number of Americans assaulted on shore.

For a look at the possible danger, hear this woman vacationer's tale:

The woman, her husband and two daughters spent their first day in the Bahamas in a sailboat, watching as a small airplane dropped bales of marijuana to a yacht and several lobster boats.

Her husband quickly loaded his shotgun and strung up two spearguns.

"Our sailboat only does five knots. We were scared to death. It was as flagrant as anything you ever saw," she said.

\* *L.S.G. Notes & News* \*

Election of LSG Officers: Present terms expire Sept. 1, 1981.

Nominations for LSG Election: Nominations for this year's election of officers for the LSG include:

President: Sir Jack D.L. Holmes  
Vice President: Dr. Jane L. de Grummond  
Sec.-Treasurer: John L. Howells  
(Terms to expire Sept. 1, 1983)

Study Group members will receive their ballots in the mail.

LTJL Reprints: The LSG is pleased to announce publication of its single volume reprinting of the first five installments (1975-1980) of the "Life and Times of Jean Laffite. Sale of the reprint, a soft-cover volume of approximately 120 pages, including some material not originally published in LTJL, will be by subscription only at an estimated cost of \$12 each. (LSG members may purchase their copies at a substantial discount). Individuals and institutions who wish to have their names placed on the subscription list should contact Robert C. Vogel, 6971 Homestead Ave. South, Cottage Grove, MN 55016.

1981 Membership Dues: Records indicate that a number of you have not yet paid 1981 membership dues, which are \$6 regular (\$7.50 outside of U.S.), \$20 sustaining, \$100 lifetime. Remittance should be sent to John Howells, LSG treasurer, 2570 Kevin Lane, Houston, Texas 77043.

1982 Meeting: A meeting of the LSG is being planned to coincide with the Louisiana Historical Association's annual conference next March at Lake Charles, La. Persons interested in attending a symposium or paper session on Laffite at Lake Charles should contact either Robert Vogel or Jack Holmes as soon as possible.

UNIQUE GRAND ISLE "SPORT"

Grand Isle has found a unique 20th century way to live up to its old reputation of being a "rough and tumble" place — a bar in town offers chocolate pudding wrestling for women. That's right, chocolate pudding, not mud like all the tackier places in the United States use. But then, Grand Isle always was different.

This special sport was shown nationwide early this summer on the syndicated "P.M. Magazine" television show.

Thirty gallons of chocolate pudding and five gallons of whipped creme are poured into a squared off area. Wrestlers are allowed three minutes per round. The grand prize winner receives \$200.

DEADLINE FOR THE FALL LSG NEWSLETTER IS OCTOBER 30. ARTICLES AND LETTERS ARE WELCOMED.

Send to PAM KEYES, 320 "I" N.W., Miami, Ok. 74354.

*A Review*

Sea Heritage News is a lively publication devoted to continuing the tradition of sea lore and history.

Published every two months by the Sea Heritage Foundation, the newsletter offers articles on sea terminology and sea shanties. In addition, the newsletter serves as a sort of catalog for books on the sea and recordings of folk-lore and sea shanties.

Although this well-designed publication seems geared more to the whaling and clipper ship aficionados, it could prove interesting to persons interested in privateers and Caribbean sea lore.

Sample copies may be obtained by writing to The Sea Heritage Foundation, 254-26 75th Avenue, Glen Oaks, N.Y. 11004. Various subscription rates are offered, from \$8 to \$2,500.

— The Ed.

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## -3- Debate Prompts Letters

The following is a copy of a letter Sir Jack D.L. Holmes of the Laffite Study Group wrote to the editor of the Lake Charles American Press newspaper regarding the controversy about whether or not the I-10 bridge should be named for Laffite.

Dear Sir:

The current embroglio concerning the naming of the bridge over the Calcasieu for Jean Laffite has extended beyond the confines of his historical haunts in southwestern Louisiana and Galveston. The AP carried a note in the May 26 issue of the Times-Picayune/The States-Item concerning the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera antics of the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury.

Is this "tempest in a teacup" really necessary? Why must every generation seek to rewrite history in its own image, rather than to stick to the facts? Must the advances of a minority come at the expense of tradition? Is it really important to rip out the

"offending pages" of Little Black Sambo or curse Mark Twain for using the name "Nigger Joe" for one of his characters? What does it mean when a generation rewrites its history to suit current prejudices? Maybe the Police Jury needs to re-read 1984 by George Orwell, for it deals in the rewriting of history to suit current needs and prejudices.

It is prejudice, pure and simple, to condemn Jean Laffite because he was guilty of piracy, cruelty and slave trading. Under similar logic, no bridge could be built across the Hudson and called the George Washington Bridge because he cheated on his wife, had a bad temper and equally bad breath! Forrest County, Miss., should hang its head in shame because Nathan Bedford Forrest was an ante-bellum slave trader. Martin Luther King, Jr., who spent some time in the Birmingham jail, was not a saint; just a well-meaning, remarkable human being, who made many mistakes. Shall we cancel all the streets

and parks named for him because he was a convicted felon? Since Louis Armstrong played in a New Orleans brothel, is it not ironic that a park is named for him within a stone's throw of where he used to play?

I won't belabor the point. The fact is, as William Shakespeare wrote so many years ago, "The evil that men do lives after them, while the good is oft interred in their bones."

May I plead, as did Mark Antony about Caesar, "so let it be with Laffite."

While you are debating about naming the bridge, why not get it correctly spelled, with LAFFITE as the gentleman used to sign his own name, rather than with LAFITTE because a Galveston restaurant's silver service had the error engraved on it!

Sincerely yours,

Sir Jack D.L. Holmes  
Ph.D., O.I.C.  
President, The Laffite Study Group

(What follows below is an excerpt from a letter from Lake Charles attorney Fred R. Godwin to the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury.)

With reference to the opposition to memorializing Lafitte, the most significant information is the statement in the two-page handout about Lafitte (Ed. note: he refers to a description of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park prepared by JLNHP Chief Historian Lionel Bienvenu.) which says:

"Collectively referred to as the 'Baratarians' and held together by Lafitte's leadership and the employment afforded by his activity the pattern of inter-group cooperation for the common good was reinforced. No man was turned away because of race, color,

previous condition of servitude.

The government among the Baratarians was purely democratic, based on ability. These men had a profound effect on all South Louisiana, and indeed helped win the Battle of New Orleans." (Emphasis added.)

Congress thus considered Lafitte a valid and significant historical figure and used his name to identify the Park because he portrayed cultural diversity and fostered inter-group cooperation for the common good among people based on ability. For that reason, it would be highly appropriate to publicize his image here since he personifies the same cultural diversity we have in Calcasieu Parish and he stood for inter-group cooperation.

The fact that Lafitte was a slave trader should be regarded in its

AN UPDATE ON THE JEAN LAFITTE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
By Lionel Bienvenu, Chief Historian

The 20-year-old dream of a large national park for South Louisiana was finally grasped and made reality by the 95th Congress on Nov. 10, 1978.

The aim of the park direction is many faceted; complex and interesting. Visitors to South Louisiana respond favorably to the unique culture of the region. The music, food, religion, language and carefree life style is the veneer covering a much richer diversity of culture.

People of the Mississippi Delta Region frequently speak foreign languages, and their music, dancing, cooking and folklore reflect their ancestral origin in Europe, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. These Louisianans have much in common because they share the same environment, the same future, the same love of life, and the same limited dry-land areas for homes, labor and recreation.

Several culture groups have occupied the low-lying land of the delta region and have contributed to its unique culture. While becoming a part of American society and adopting a Southern life-style, most of the groups have retained their identity and continued most of their traditional practices. One of the aims of the JLNHP is to identify, study and preserve the 29 separate culture groups and their traditions. Studies now underway are providing details about these populations.

The Lafitte Park will be operated out of six units, each independent and dealing with separate historical, archaeological, natural history and cultural themes.

The main operating unit of the JLNHP is located in the Lower Pontalba Building, 500 St. Ann Street. Built by the Baroness de Pontalba, one of the early benefactors of New Orleans, the unit features a museum describing most of the culture groups which make up the population of South Louisiana, their history and their current contributions.

Four different guided tours of walks are offered daily, every hour, on the following subjects:

The Haunts of Jean Lafitte -- 1 hour.

The History of the French Quarter -- 1 hour and 15 minutes.

The Legends of the French Quarter -- 1 and a half hours.

The People of the French Quarter -- 45 minutes.

Each of these tours is presented by a trained qualified United States National Park Ranger. Also, in the station at the Pontalba there is a bookstore and sales counter, where books, slides, record albums and post cards may be purchased. Special events are held throughout the year at nearby Jackson Square.

The second unit of the Lafitte Park is located about six miles down the Mississippi River from the Pontalba Unit. The Chalmette National Battlefield Unit is in the town of Chalmette and commemorates the victory by Andrew Jackson and Jean Lafitte and their gallant heroes over the veteran British forces under General Sir Edward Pakenham. The final land battle of the War of 1812 was fought on the battlefield Jan. 8, 1815, to bring the war to a successful conclusion for American arms.

The Barataria Marsh Unit is being purchased by the Federal Government to establish, preserve and maintain important areas of the coastal marsh wetlands.

Archaeology, history, natural history and folk ways will be pointed out and protected in the swamps and marshes of Jefferson Parish, Louisiana.

The marsh unit will include 8,500 acres and will preserve many sites of ancient Indian cultures. Remains of Troyville, Marksville and Tchefuncte groups will be interpreted for visitors who may arrive by boat or by land vehicles. Several self-guiding trails will be constructed throughout this section of the park, lying between Bayou Coquille to the North and Bayou Barataria to the south of New Orleans on Louisiana Highway 45.

The Big Oak and Little Oak Islands sites, containing important ancient American Indian remains, lie just off Interstate 10 in New Orleans East, not far from Irish Bayou.

Two uniformed Park Rangers will be on duty to guide visitors through the area and to answer questions. The remains of the ancient Tchefuncte culture will be featured at this unit.

The Isleno Museum Unit is located in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, about 10 miles down the highway from

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PARK, continued from pg.4  
Chalmette Battlefield on Highway 46. It was donated and furnished to commemorate the Isleno People of South Louisiana, their culture and folk-ways under the Spanish Regime in Louisiana in the middle 1770s.

Don Bernardo de Galvez brought in several groups of immigrants from Spain, France and the Canary Islands to colonize South Louisiana. The Canarians were referred to as Los Islenos and were assigned to form colonies, to set up farming, fishing and defense operations.

Galveztown, Valenzuela, Barataria and San Bernardo were set up between 1778 and 1783. After several years, the first three colonies failed, leaving all the Islenos settled in the area around Delacroix Island in St. Bernard Parish. Canary Islanders sent to Louisiana by Charles III, King of Spain, numbered 1,600. It is estimated there are 10,000 Islenos in St. Bernard Parish today.

The Isleno Museum will feature written and audiovisual material on the culture of the group: recordings of decimas, the ten-line sung folk music,

recipes and samples of cuisine, Isleno Spanish language and history. Many arts and crafts will be demonstrated on an irregular basis. The museum will be manned seven days a week, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

There are no fees or charges of any kind within the park or its units. Transportation must be arranged by the park visitor.

The National Park System, of which JLNHP is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of its people.

The National Park Service administers two other areas commemorating the War of 1812 besides the Chalmette National Battlefield. They are Fort McHenry National Memorial and Historic Shrine, Baltimore, Md., and Perry's Victory International Peace Memorial, Put-in-Bay, Ohio.

No overnight accommodations, camping or swimming are available at this time. Boating, cycling, horseback riding, hiking, fishing and photography are encouraged.

For further information, persons may contact the Superintendent at 1-504-589-3882.

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torical context, moreover that fact, insofar as its potential for offending any members of our community, should be considered in light of the further fact that he was fully pardoned by President Madison for any and all of his misadventures and according to Bienvenu, "He turned against slavery after living with the Mortimores in the 1830s."

The idea of naming the bridge after Lafitte is a good one for the following reasons, among others,

1. He personifies cultural diversity (French, Spanish, Jewish) and he stood for equality of opportunity.

2. He is historically indented with this area and the aura and mystique associated with his name is attraction for any tourist.

3. The name immediately associates with Contraband Days.

4. It would be a lot of trouble to take all the crossed pistols off the bridge.

5. The name is apolitical.

Maybe someone else will come up with a better name, but I doubt it. Anyway, I send you all of this in hopes that you won't turn it down for the wrong reason.

Yours truly,

Fred R. Godwin

#### JLNHP DRAFT PLAN PUBLISHED

The Draft General Management Plan, Development Concept Plan and Environmental Assessment for Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, Louisiana, was published in July by the Dept. of the Interior.

Filled with well-drawn maps of all the park units and their alter-

concise and clear language which presents the five park alternatives in a brief but thorough manner.

The JLNHP staff have been conducting public meetings in conjunction with the publication of this draft. Comments from the public will be collected by the park officials until

NOTES FROM A CORRESPONDENCE ON THE LAFFITE JOURNAL COLLECTION

During 1957, Dr. Jane de Grummond and the late Ray Thompson held a running correspondence debate over the Laffite Journals, John A. Laffite, and Stanley Arthur.

Dr. de Grummond is Professor Emeritus of History at Louisiana State University and the author of "The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans" among other works.

Thompson was a magazine and newspaper writer and the author of "Land of Lafitte the Pirate."

The correspondence was initiated when Thompson wrote to Dr. de Grummond about an article which she had written on Gamble (one of Laffite's captains) for a Sunday newspaper section.

In the article, she had mentioned Laffite's "diary" and Thompson was eager to find out if a ms. other than John A. Laffite's collection had surfaced. He was disappointed to discover Dr. de Grummond was writing in reference to Stanley Arthur's work with John A. Laffite, as can be seen in this letter excerpt:

"the signature of Jean Lafitte (in one of the John A. Laffite bibles) was not even a poor copy of Lafitte's signature. And to add further disappointment several of the names had been written in the Bible with a ball point pen! We were crushed because we had hoped sincerely the bibles would make us believe his story."

"(John A. Laffite) turned up in New Orleans, this time telling us he was collaborating with Stanley Arthur to whom he had shown the diary... I remember that Arthur was much impressed by him and his bibles and his diary...and there was talk of publishing the diary. But by that time I was busy on other things and did not pay too much attention to the matter.

As soon as she received Thompson's letter, Dr. de Grummond was ready with a defense.

She wrote, "I worked for two years on the papers of Jonathan Jones Wheeler. He was a ship's captain and I studied his papers from 1808 to 1842 when he died. In a pocket in the back of one of his books was his pencil. The stub shoved up into a metal holder. This pencil wrote like a ball point pen.

Dr. de Grummond continued, "It is not my understanding that all the entries in the bibles were written by Jean Laffite. He gave one to his wife Emma and she wrote entries and after her death other people did. It could be that in a manner of doodling, some of them tried to imitate Jean Laffite's rubrica. Or maybe the writing had faded and this railroad engineer (John A.) descendant couldn't see it very well and went over it with his pen - any yokel would have done the same.

"John Andrechyne Laffite probably does not know French and probably did not know what was in his ancestor's diary until Doubleday had it translated (for "The Corsair"). Do you think Doubleday would have gone to this expense, and have sent Madeleine Fabiola Kent to Washington and the Federal Archives to check out certain parts, and then published this work saying it would probably prove to be the definitive biography of Jean Laffite...if they did not think they had a good thing?"

Responding to Dr. de Grummond's defense, Thompson chose to avoid much of the conflict of opinion, as can be seen in his reply:

"As to the Lafitte diary -- I said "if the diary Doubleday used was the same as that which the Illinois railroader said he had" and with whom we know Arthur spent a great deal of time on the third visit to New Orleans, it was fiction. ....

"The Jean Lafitte signature could not possibly be the real Laffite -- it is an entirely different hand. The inscription is in French, the Bible being presented to Emma Hortense Mortimore and dated Jan. 1, 1832. ....but it has nothing that is even suggestive of Laffite's true signature -- at any period in his life."

This correspondence is only a sample of the wide variance in opinion over the authenticity of the manuscripts a retired railroad man was shuffling across the Midwest and South in the 1950s up to the time of their sale shortly before his death.

The authenticity of the Laffite Journal Collection has yet to be officially proven.