

The Laffite Society Chronicles

Volume IX Number 1
February, 2003

CONTENTS

ARTICLES	AUTHOR	PAGE
THE EDITOR'S PAGE	DON C. MARLER	1
THE LAFFITE SOCIETY 2002		
HOLIDAY SOCIAL	Jeff Modzelewski	2-5
WHO WERE THESE GUYS? SOME OF THE LESSER CHARACTERS IN THE STORY OF THE LAFFITES.....	Robert Vogel	6-14
LAFFITE'S LEGACY	Gary Fretz	15-20
ONE MAN'S DEATH SPARKS U.S. WAR AGAINST PIRACY IN 1822.....	Pam Keyes	21-23
MISON ROUGE ARTIFACT ANALYSIS.....	R. Dale Olson	24
RESCUING PIERRE BOIT LAFFITTE	Don C. Marler	25
CALENDAR		26
BULLETIN BOARD		26
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	INSIDE BACK COVER	
MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION	INSIDE BACK COVER	

© 2003 By The Laffite Society. All rights reserved. Except for brief citations accompanied by proper attribution, no part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means--electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise--without permission of The Laffite Society.

The Laffite Society
Post Office Box 1325
Galveston, Texas 77553-1325
<http://thelaffitesociety.com/>

EDITOR'S PAGE

Don C. Marler

The year 2002 was a good year for the Laffite Society. Dale and Diane Olson, co-founders of the society and dedicated supporters, purchased The Trolley Stop building in Galveston (2000 block on the south side of the Strand) and in that facility provide a meeting place for the society's monthly meetings. And delightfully, a place for the December Laffite Society party.

The December party was memorable for several reasons not the least of which was the ambience. The Art-deco bar is a wonderful attraction in itself. There was ample space, the food and drinks were great. Inviting guests was a great idea. Jeffery Modzelewski did a superb job as President with his introductory remarks, and Dale Olson did an almost unbelievable feat in introducing the many members and guests with editorial comment on most, and all without notes. The party was a perfect way to end a good year.

When there was no material for the February issue of *The Chronicles* on January first I became frightened and issued a call for articles, not believing that there was anything in the repertoire of the Laffite Society members that could meet the need in such a short time. I would not have to exercise my faith in the membership so much if members would let me know in advance what they are working on and for which issue it might be ready. Some do that; it helps and is appreciated.

Looking for another good year, I remain committed to *The Laffite Society Chronicles*.

Send material and correspondence to:

Don C. Marler
HC 53 Box 345
Hemphill, Texas 75948
409 579 2184

dcmsmm@inu.net

THE LAFFITE SOCIETY 2002 HOLIDAY SOCIAL

Jeff Modzelewski

The Laffite Society hosted its annual holiday social on Sunday evening, December 15, 2002. The setting was the Maceo Bakery and Buccaneer Rooms on the second floor of the historic Jockusch Building. This venue is located at the corner of 21st St. and Strand in downtown Galveston, and was generously made available for the evening by its owners, Laffite Society co-founders Dale and Diane Olson.

In past years the Laffite Society holiday social has generally been organized as a pot-luck event publicized to members only, with a few non-member guests invited informally by word of mouth. The Society voted this year to make the event a more formal, catered affair, to be held in an elegant ambience, with dinner tables set with linen, place cards and candles, and with printed invitations sent to a combination of members and non-members. Why was this change made?

The decision partially resulted, perhaps, from a tacit need not only to forestall the usual winter doldrums, but to take extra measures to dispel the gloom of current national and world events—the permanent change in perspective occasioned by the 9/11/01 terror attack, continued financial market woes, the threat of renewed war between this country and the mid-East, etc.

In addition, however, although the Laffite Society has never aggressively pursued self-promotion, it has of late increasingly been recognized by other research groups, such as the Paul Revere (Golden Triangle) Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution in Port Arthur, and the Texas Map Society headquartered in Arlington, both of which Laffite Society members have recently been invited to address. Perhaps in a self-acknowledgment of the merits its activities might hold for other civic and research groups, the decision was made to invite, in addition to all members, a significant number of

non-members, selected from groups such as the Galveston Parks Board, the Galveston Historical Foundation, and the Rosenberg Library, and others of the community with a known interest in history.

The event this year was envisioned and engineered by Laffite Society First Vice-President Jim Nonus, assisted by Second Vice President Mike Eubank, Treasurer Jerry Eubank, Past President Dale Olson, Parliamentarian Diane Olson, Past President Kathy Modzelewski, and President Jeff Modzelewski. Eye-catching invitations sported a black cover overlaid with a silver skull and crossbones, and a delicious meal was catered by Cathy and Tommy Townsend of Galveston Connections, Inc. More than seventy attendees enjoyed an evening that went far longer—and merrily so - than the published time of 7:00 – 9:00 P.M.

Arriving guests were met curbside by the elegant and exotic Jim Nonus, a.k.a. Jean Laffite, attired in wig, period costume, and piratical accoutrements. They then made their way upstairs to the second floor vestibule, where a professional photographer stood at the ready to take portraits. The attendees then passed southward into the Maceo Bakery, where bartender Chris Fleming served up a variety of libations, among which was the famous—depending upon the number consumed, one might say infamous – New Orleans Sazerac Cocktail.

The spacious room filled quickly as guests milled about sipping their drinks. Ladies in seasonal finery with some of their gentlemen escorts in black tie; the beautiful décor and furnishings of a historic building just recently remodeled; the holiday season; all combined to set the proper mood.

Too soon, the cocktail hour was brought to a close by a summons to the north end of the building to dine in the beautiful Buccaneer Room. Dale and

Diane Olson had given much thought to the seating of guests, and likely all found themselves seated at a table with both old friends and new acquaintances and of both like and novel interests. While the main course was to be served buffet-style, salads and desserts were to be served at the individual tables. In short order guests found their names on place cards created by Kathy Modzelewski and were seated.

In preparation for a reprise (suggested by Jim and Dale) of an introductory ceremony witnessed at the Louisiana Historical Society's annual banquet several years ago, Dale, Diane, Kathy, and Jeff spent several hours in the days preceding the social, capturing a comment or two with which to introduce each attendee. As guests ate their salads, Jeff stood at the front of the room and publicly introduced all, person by person or couple by couple, table by table.

The process, which might sound tedious to one who did not witness it, is on the contrary a not-so-time-consuming, delightful way to make all feel special and welcome. To paraphrase one attendee's remarks afterwards, "Far from being bored, as I heard the interesting things said about all the people in the room, I wanted to get up and go sit at all the different tables to talk to everyone."

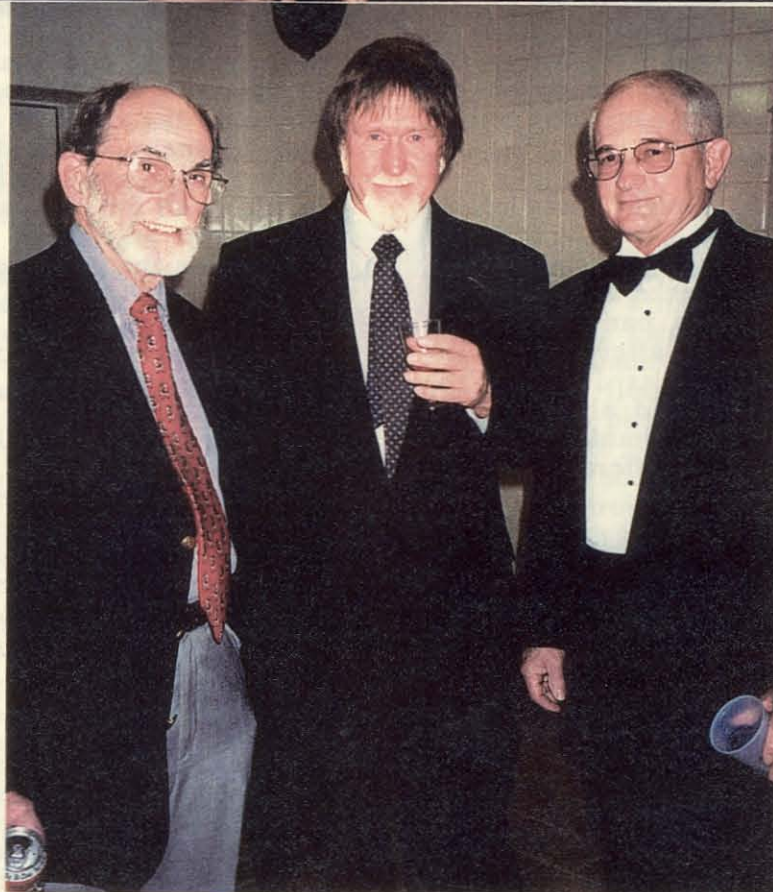
The close of introductions dovetailed with the end of the salad course, and guests arose to proceed to the buffet line for their main course. After the delicious meal, dessert and coffee were served at each table, and as attendees turned their attention to these, Jim a.k.a. Jean Laffite stood to remind all of the chance to have photographs taken—with or without our daring corsair in the shot!, and that all were welcome to adjourn anew to the Maceo Bakery for more wine, beer, and Sazerac Cocktails at the close of the meal.

Jim then reintroduced Jeff, who spoke for some ten minutes to tell the group something of the Laffite Society, its focus, the time and place of its monthly meetings, and the availability of membership applications that very night. Jeff then turned the proceedings over to Dale.

The audience response attested to the value and interest of Dale's remarks. The group, instead of becoming restless after cocktails and a full meal and with the evening already prolonged past its 9:00 P.M. published close, sat rapt as Dale spoke of the serious side of the Laffite Society: the research conducted by many of its members. Without notes, Dale outlined the particular focus of the efforts of perhaps a dozen Laffite Society members. By the end of his presentation, one could well have experienced two proverbial effects in the room—the sound of a pin dropping, and listeners knocked over with a feather. Dale concluded his remarks by thanking all for their attendance, and the group adjourned to the Maceo Bakery for the promised after-dinner drinks.

And so the three portions of the evening's non-edible, non-potable entertainment occurred just as desired. Jim in his Jean Laffite incarnation created a fun and festive first impression for arriving guests; Jeff made the attendees feel truly special and welcome as they began dinner; and Dale, during dessert and coffee, gave the audience an under-the-surface glimpse at the knowledge and effort put forth by members in their research endeavors.

Within a half-hour, most had departed the premises or would soon so do, and little remained of the 2002 Laffite Society holiday social except for memories and the stratagems already hatching for next year's event!



Dorothy Karilanovic, Laffite Society secretary,
and Many Green, orchestra leader

Bill Foley, member, Don C. Marler,
editor of The Chronicles and
Mike Eubank, second vice-president



Sheldon Kendall, avocational archaeologist
and Sandra Pollon, ceramics expert.



Betty Wilson and Sybil Marler, members and supporters

WHO WERE THESE GUYS?

SOME OF THE LESSER CHARACTERS IN THE STORY OF THE LAFFITES

Robert C. Vogel

AMIGONI

The corsair Julius Caesar Amigoni (sometimes spelled Amizoni) was captain of the Baratarian privateer *Aguila* when it cleared the port of New Orleans in February 1815 with an illegal cargo of arms. Before leaving Louisiana waters, Amigoni handed over command of the *Aguila* (also known as the *Petit Milan*) to Vincent Gambi, who was AWOL from Jackson's army that had recently defended New Orleans against the British. Gambi sailed the vessel to Boquilla de las Piedras on the coast of Mexico, where the cargo was turned over to the Mexican revolutionary army. On its return voyage, the privateer was seized by U.S. authorities for violations of the Neutrality Act. Amigoni returned to running arms between New Orleans and Mexico, sometimes as captain of *Petit Milan*, but his name disappears from the historical record after 1818. Like so many of the Baratarian corsairs, he was a native of Italy and "Julius Caesar" may have been a *nomme de guerre*.

ANAYA

Juan Pablo Anaya was born in Lagos, Nueva Galacia (Jalisco), in 1785, and was a village priest when the Mexican revolution broke out in 1810. A follower of the revolutionary priest Manuel Hidalgo y Costilla, in 1813 Father Anaya attained the rank of general and became a trusted subordinate of Juan Nepomuceno Rosains (1782-1833), who commanded the rebel forces around Veracruz. In the summer of 1814, General Rosains opened negotiations with the Baratarians to provide arms and naval support for the insurgents, and in September the Mexican Congress dispatched Anaya as the head of their mission to the United States. Arriving in Louisiana just in time for the British invasion, Anaya served as a volunteer

on Andrew Jackson's staff during the Battle of New Orleans. Spanish agents reported that he was involved with Pierre Laffite and others in organizing a seaborne attack against Tampico; he also had dealings with the filibuster Jose Alvarez de Toledo (1779-1858), who wrote the Mexican Congress on 10 February 1815 requesting Anaya's removal. Very soon afterwards, Anaya became disillusioned with the mission and on 18 March 1815 he announced his intention to return to Mexico, where he retired from revolutionary activities, but later served in the government after independence. He died in Mexico City in 1850.

BLANQUE

Jean Blaque is best known as the confidential bearer of Laffite's letters to Governor William C. C. Claiborne in September 1814. Born in France, he was a cousin of the colonial prefect Clement de Laussat, whom he accompanied to New Orleans in 1803. According to a contemporary source, Blaque had played a small part in the French Revolution of 1789. After the Louisiana Purchase, he settled in New Orleans and prospered as a merchant, trading in slaves and other merchandise. After his marriage to Marie Delphine McCarthy in 1808, he served in the territorial government of Louisiana, was a delegate to the state constitutional convention, and was elected to the state house of representatives. He was one of the members of the Committee for Public Safety formed to organize the defense of New Orleans in 1814--and was therefore a logical choice as the intermediary between the Baratarians and the Claiborne administration. Blaque appears to have had no further connection with the Baratarians after 1814. He died in New Orleans in 1816. His wife married Dr. Nicolas Lalaurie and became notorious for her cruel treatment of their slaves.

CHAMPLIN

Guy R. Champlin was one of a relatively small number of American privateers who operated out of Galveston. His name appears frequently in letters written by Pierre and Jean Laffite that are preserved in the Cuban archives. Champlin, who is usually identified in contemporary documents as a New Yorker, was captain of the armed schooner *General Artigas* (alias *Minerva*) when it arrived at Galveston with Louis Aury's squadron in the spring of 1817. He appears to have frequented New Orleans during this period, but left the Gulf of Mexico sometime late in 1818, possibly as a member of Aury's expedition to Amelia Island, Florida. He may have been a relative of Stephen Champlin (1789-1870) of Rhode Island, who served as an officer in the U.S. Navy and performed heroic deeds at the Battle of Lake Erie (10 September 1813).

CHEW

Beverly Chew played a leading role in the suppression of piracy and smuggling during his term of office as Collector of the Port of New Orleans (1817-1829). Born in Virginia in 1773, Chew immigrated to New Orleans two years prior to the Louisiana Purchase and became a partner in the firm of Chew & Relf, one of the city's biggest mercantile houses. He also served as New Orleans postmaster and president of the local branch of the Bank of the United States. Chew's reports to the Secretary of the Treasury contain detailed intelligence on events at Galveston in 1817-1820, when he was a staunch opponent of the Laffite brothers, Aury, Humbert, et al., and did everything in his power to drive them out of the Gulf of Mexico. When he died in 1851, he was one of the richest men in Louisiana. (It is noted that that a John Chew of Baltimore signed on with General Xavier Mina's ill-fated Mexican filibuster in 1816, was promoted to the rank of lieutenant of infantry, and apparently perished during the Soto la Marina campaign in 1817. The nature of this individual's

relationship, if any, to the Collector of New Orleans is not known.)

DAVEZAC

Auguste Genevieve Valentin Davezac was born in 1780 at Aux Cayes, in what is now the southern part of Haiti, the son of a well-to-do planter. Educated in Europe, he joined the Creole exodus to the United States during the slave rebellion in Santo Domingo and settled in New Orleans, where he read law and was admitted to the bar on 2 March 1813. His sister Louise was married to Edward Livingston (1764-1837), who was his mentor in the law, although not a law partner as such. Davezac specialized in criminal defense and from time to time represented Baratarian privateers and smugglers in the federal district court. In his memoir, *Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres*, the merchant Vincent Nolte writes that he was frequently seen in the company of the Laffite brothers, though his name does not appear in court records as their attorney. After being named to the Committee for Public Safety in 1814, Davezac served as a volunteer aide-de-camp at Andrew Jackson's headquarters during the Battle of New Orleans. He entered the diplomatic service in 1831 and died in New York City in 1851.

DeFOREST

David Curtis DeForest was born in Connecticut in 1774 and established a business in Buenos Aires in 1806. By 1814, he was an active supporter of the revolutionary government of the United Provinces of South America and outfitted several privateers during 1815-1818. In 1818 the rebels appointed him consul general to the United States and he took up residence in Baltimore that same year. A controversial figure, he intrigued with various foreign and domestic officials to secure U.S. support for the new republic. Late in 1818 he was in direct contact with Pierre Laffite regarding possible arms purchases and filibustering expeditions against the Spanish dominions, though nothing became of these schemes. When he was recalled by the government Buenos Aires in 1823, DeForest chose to retire

to his home in New Haven, where he died in 1825. Samuel F. B. Morse painted a well-known portrait of Mrs. DeForest, who donated \$5,000 for Yale University's first undergraduate scholarship in 1823.

DESFARGES

Few details are known of the life of Jean Desfarges, master of the Galveston privateer schooner *Le Brave (Bravo)* that was captured by U.S. revenue cutters in September 1819. According to district court records and contemporary newspaper accounts, Desfarges was born ca. 1798 in Bordeaux and was well educated. He and his crew were condemned to death for piracy on 22 November 1819. Desfarges and his lieutenant were hanged aboard a U.S. naval barge at New Orleans on 25 May 1820. According to newspaper accounts, Desfarges attempted to commit suicide before the sentence could be carried out by jumping overboard, but marines pulled him out of the water and brought him to the yardarm. He was perhaps the first person executed under the Act of Congress (3 March 1819) making piracy a capital crime.

DICK

John Dick was born in Ireland in 1788 and emigrated to Virginia ca. 1802, eventually settling in New Orleans in the fall of 1811. He read law and was admitted to the bar in March 1812. While in private practice, he represented Master Commandant Daniel T. Patterson (1786-1839) and Colonel George T. Ross (d. 1816) in their claims against the prizes taken in the raid on Baratavia in September 1814. At the same time, he was seeking appointment to the office of United States Attorney for the New Orleans District, replacing John R. Grymes. He was confirmed by the Senate in October 1814, but did not take office until February 20, 1815. It was Dick who carried out the presidential pardon for the Baratarians; he also prosecuted Andrew Jackson for contempt of court in March 1815. Sometime during the spring of 1815, Dick fought a duel with Grymes, ostensibly over the latter's ties

to the Baratarian pirates; both men were wounded and Dick walked with a limp for the rest of his life. After Judge Dominick Hall's death on December 19, 1820, Dick was elevated to the federal bench and presided over the district court in New Orleans until his death from tuberculosis on April 23, 1824.

FATIO

Little is known regarding the family and early career of Felipe Fatio, who arrived in New Orleans in May 1817, as the vice consul of the government of Spain. In this capacity, he dealt directly with the Laffite brothers and other secret agents and endeavored to defeat the King's enemies. In June 1819, King Ferdinand VII granted him the order of the Cross of Isabella the Catholic in recognition of his service to the crown. Fatio died in New Orleans on 4 February 1820.

GRAHAM

Born in Dumfries, Virginia, ca. 1772, George Graham graduated from Columbia University in New York City in 1790 and practiced law in Virginia, where he also served as colonel of the Fairfax Light Horse during the War of 1812. His older brother, John Graham (1744-1820) was a diplomat. In 1814 he was appointed chief clerk in the War Department, where he was later interim Secretary of War (16 October 1816 to 9 December 1817). A specialist in Indian affairs, Graham earned a reputation as a successful "trouble-shooter," which is the reason Secretary of State John Quincy Adams tapped him for the secret mission to Galveston in the summer of 1818. Graham received his written appointment as State Department agent on 2 June 1818 and arrived at Galveston sometime in late August. He met with Jean Laffite at Galveston and later communicated with Pierre Laffite in New Orleans before returning to Washington, where he personally delivered his report to Adams on 20 November 1818. Although the Monroe Administration was none too pleased by his performance as a secret agent, Graham was still part of the inner circle of government. He became president of

the Washington branch of the Bank of the United States and in 1823 he was appointed Commissioner of the General Land Office, a prized political appointment. Graham died in Washington, D.C., in 1830 and was buried in the Congressional Cemetery. His son, George Mason Graham (1807-1891) settled in Louisiana, where he is known as the "Father of Louisiana State University."

GRYMES

John Randolph Grymes was a controversial figure throughout his adult life. Born in Orange County, Virginia, in 1786, he read law before immigrating to Louisiana in 1808, where he became one of the original members of the Louisiana bar (admitted 2 March 1813) and was for a time a partner in Edward Livingston's law office. On 29 November 1811 he was confirmed as United States Attorney in New Orleans and ably served in that capacity until he resigned in October 1814 to become the attorney for several of the Baratarians. His conduct in this matter led him to fight a duel with the new district attorney, John Dick, in the spring of 1815; both men were wounded, Grymes receiving a gunshot to the calf. (The story of his \$10,000 fee for defending the Laffite brothers, told many years after the events of 1814-1815, is probably apocryphal.) In 1822, Grymes married Susanna Bosque, the widow of former governor William C. C. Claiborne. Grymes fought several duels, instigated a gunfight on the floor of the state house of representatives, and was a notorious gambler. He died in New Orleans in 1854.

HALL

Warren DeWitt Clinton Hall was born in North Carolina in 1788 and immigrated to Louisiana ca. 1809. He practiced law in Natchitoches before joining the Gutierrez-Magee filibustering expedition to Texas in 1812. Offended by the execution of the senior Spanish officers taken prisoner at the Battle of Rosilio (19 March 1813), he resigned his commission in the Republican Army of the North and

returned to Louisiana. After the Battle of New Orleans, Hall joined the Texas expedition of filibuster Henry Perry (d. 1817) and was part of the group shipwrecked at Bolivar Point in November 1815. In 1817, he sailed from Galveston with Colonel Perry as part of General Xavier Mina's (1789-1818) expedition to Soto la Marina, but apparently he did not accompany them on their ill-fated march into the interior in the spring of 1817. His whereabouts between that time and the spring of 1819 are not known, but he surfaced as an associate of the filibuster James Long (1793-1822) when that individual attempted to liberate Texas. It was while serving as a member of General Long's second Texas expedition that Hall became personally acquainted with Jean Laffite at Galveston in February or March 1820. Hall was elected vice president of Long's short-lived government in 1820-1821, but returned to Rapides Parish in Louisiana after Long's expedition against La Bahia fell apart. In 1828 he returned to Texas with his wife Julietta and settled in Brazoria. He was made a colonel in the republican army during the Texas Revolution and later served as Secretary of War under the Republic of Texas. Retiring from public life, Hall moved to Galveston Island, where he died in 1867.

HERRERA

Like Hidalgo and Morelos, Jose Manuel de Herrera was a priest who took up arms against the Spanish king in 1811. He represented Tecpan at the Congress of Chilpango in September 1813 and was a signer of the Constitution of Apatzingan on 22 October 1814. On 14 July 1815, the Mexican Congress appointed Herrera its minister plenipotentiary to the United States, replacing Juan Pablo Anaya (1785-1849). He rendezvoused with Vincent Gambi at the little port of Boquilla de Piedras and arrived in New Orleans on 1 November 1815, with 29,000 pesos to purchase arms. Herrera went to Galveston with Louis-Michel Aury (1788-1821) and officially declared the island to be a part of the Republic of Mexico on 12 September 1816. When the Laffite faction accomplished its coup

d'état, he affirmed their legitimacy as agents of the Mexican revolution on 15 April 1817 and quickly returned to New Orleans. Herrera was back in Mexico by 1818 and made his peace with the royalists. After independence, he held a minor post in the Iturbide government and retired from public life in 1827.

HOLMES

Andrew Hunter Holmes was the younger brother of David Holmes, the first governor of Mississippi. He was licensed to practice law in Natchez in 1809 at the age of 18; the following year, he killed an army officer in a duel on the west bank of the Mississippi River. At the beginning of the War of 1812, Holmes was a captain in the Mississippi militia; entering federal service, he was sent to Louisiana with a detachment of the 24th Infantry to help interdict smuggling and privateering. On the night of 15-16 November 1812, a patrol led by Holmes captured several pirogues loaded with contraband in a bayou below New Orleans, resulting in the first prosecution of Pierre and Jean Laffite in the district court. Holmes went on to serve on the Great Lakes frontier, where on August 4, 1814, he was killed in action while leading an attack against the British fort on Fort Mackinac; after the war, the fort was renamed Fort Holmes. The names of Holmesville, Mississippi, and Holmes County, Ohio, were also named in his honor.

HUMBERT

A native of Rouvray, France, Jean Joseph Amable Humbert was born in 1755 and was a humble tradesman until the French Revolution. He enlisted in the army as a private ca. 1789 and rose quickly through the ranks as one of France's best combat leaders. He fought in numerous campaigns against the Germans and Austrians and was promoted to major general in 1794 and lieutenant general in 1798. Humbert commanded the expeditionary force sent against Ireland in 1798 but the invasion was repulsed. In 1802 he commanded a division in the army sent to occupy Haiti, where he served as

military governor of Port-au-Prince until the remnants of the French army were withdrawn in 1804. Afterwards, Humbert was widely suspected to be the lover of Pauline Bonaparte (1780-1825), Napoleon's sister and the widow of his former commander in Haiti. He was committed to internal exile in Brittany but fled to the United States to avoid imprisonment, arriving in Philadelphia sometime in the early part of 1813. Setting out for Texas, he apparently arrived too late to participate in the Battle of Medina (18 August 1813), but by the late fall of 1813 he was the titular head of the filibusters forming up in Louisiana. With his Baratarian associates, Humbert spearheaded the effort to open up a link between the Texas filibusters and the Mexican Congress and visited the rebel port of Naufla on board Dominique You's schooner *Tigre* in June 1814. After narrowly avoiding capture during Patterson and Ross' raid on Grande Terre (16-23 September 1814), he joined the Americans in the defense of Louisiana against the British, where he earned the confidence of Andrew Jackson despite the fact that American troops refused to serve under Humbert's command. Humbert was the only Baratarian to formally obtain his presidential pardon, which he used to escape prosecution in district court in May 1815. A notorious filibuster, he remained active in Mexican revolutionary schemes until 1821, often working in partnership with the Laffite brothers, much to the consternation of the United States government. He was indicted for piracy in July 1820, but the case was dismissed. Afterwards, he may have briefly taught college in New Orleans, where he was popular among the members of that city's French émigré community. He died there on 3 January 1823.

JONES

Randall Jones left behind one of the handful of authentic, eyewitness accounts of Galveston Island under the Laffites. Born in Georgia in 1786, Captain Jones fought Indians in Alabama under Andrew Jackson in 1812-1813 before he joined the Republican Army of the North in Texas.

After the Battle of Medina River (18 August 1813), he became an Indian trader and had a store in Nacogdoches; it was during one of his trading trips that he visited Galveston in 1818. His brother, James W. Jones, was a member of James Long's expedition in 1819. Randall Jones was a member of the Austin Colony, settling on the Brazos River in 1822.

KEARNY

Lawrence Kearny was born in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, in 1789. He was appointed midshipman in the U.S. Navy in 1807 and apprenticed on gunboats in New York as well as the frigates *Constitution* and *President*. He first served on board the *U.S.S. Enterprise* as a junior officer in 1810-1812 and after his promotion to lieutenant in 1813 he commanded small vessels in coastal waters. Lieutenant Kearny was placed in command of *Enterprise* at the end of the War of 1812 and served on her until 1821. In December 1819, *Enterprise* departed from New York to cruise against pirates in the Gulf of Mexico and the western Caribbean. On orders of the commander of the U.S. naval forces in the Gulf of Mexico, on 27 February 1820 *Enterprise* visited Galveston to observe Laffite's preparations to abandon that place. Stories of Commander Kearny's dealings with Jean Laffite are largely apochrophal – his official report (dated 7 March 1820) makes no mention of going ashore to meet with the pirate and the only purported eye-witness account is an anonymous magazine piece published almost twenty years later. Under Kearny, *Enterprise* patrolled in Cuban waters and made several captures. He left the ship late in 1821 and took command of *U.S.S. Warren*. (*Enterprise* was subsequently wrecked off Little Curacao on 9 July 1823.) Kearny was promoted to master commandant in 1825 and saw duty in the Mediterranean. He was posted captain in 1832 and later commanded the East Indian squadron before retiring from the service in 1861. He died at the family home in Perth Amboy in 1868. Lawrence Kearny was a cousin of the army officer and explorer Stephen Watts Kearny (1794-1848)

and was also related to Civil War general Philip Kearny (1815-1862).

LAFON

Batheleme Lafon was born in France in 1769 and migrated to New Orleans ca. 1790, where he found work as an architect, civil engineer, and cartographer. In the 1790s he pursued various interests, including ownership of a theater in New Orleans. Under the American regime, Lafon received several commissions to produce accurate maps and plans, including his famous 1806 map of Louisiana. Shortly after the Battle of New Orleans, Lafon became an active privateer under the auspices of the Mexican Congress; when the Laffite party took control of Galveston on 15 April 1817 the new "government" was sworn into office on board Lafon's armed schooner, the *Carmelita*, whose owner acted as secretary of the proceedings. A few weeks later, Lafon wrote to the royalist governor of Texas requesting permission to settle on the Neches River, but nothing came of this scheme. On 7 July 1817, Lafon and Jean Laffite were indicted for failing to pay duty on some illegally imported pivot guns. Shortly after this episode, Lafon appears to have retired from privateering. While living in New Orleans, he was stricken with yellow fever and died on 29 September 1820. Lafon left no wife, but provided a legacy for his African American mistress and their natural children.

LAPORTE

Jean Baptise Laporte was born in France in 1786 and was the chancellor in the French consulate at New Orleans in 1811. He may have been related by marriage to the well-known Baratarian privateer Renato Beluche (1780-1860). He probably enlisted in the Battalion of New Orleans for service in the Battle of New Orleans. In 1817, Beverly Chew identified him as the master of the unregistered vessel *Franklin*, which was used to supply the pirate stronghold at Galveston Island. (The Rosenberg Library in Galveston owns a purported letter of marque dated 2 April 1818, issued by "La Porta" for a vessel called the *Princess*, and a license dated 15

May 1818 bearing the signature of Jean Laffite, authorizing Jao de la Porta to trade with the Karankawa Indians.) In 1825 he was one of the three creditors who came forward to take ownership of the old Maspero's exchange in New Orleans. A gentleman of means, he died in 1838.

McINTOSH

James McKay McIntosh was born in 1792 in Sunbury, Georgia. He joined the U.S. Navy and was appointed midshipman in 1811, serving on gunboats during the War of 1812. Sometime after his promotion to lieutenant in 1818, McIntosh was made first lieutenant on the *U.S.S. Firebrand*, the former Baratarian armed schooner *Dorada* (captured at Grande Terre in September 1814 and purchased by the Navy). He may have been aboard *Firebrand* during its secret mission to Mexico in 1815-1816. McIntosh was not aboard *Firebrand* when that vessel was wrecked by a hurricane off Pass Christian on 28 July 1819. While on half-pay in New Orleans awaiting a new assignment, he volunteered to sail on *U.S.S. Lynx* during its cruise against pirates in the western Gulf of Mexico during October and November 1819. It was in this capacity that he participated in the capture of pirate boats and was dispatched to parlay with Jean Laffite at Galveston. (His service record makes no mention of this incident, but he is mentioned in the official dispatches of *Lynx's* captain.) McIntosh wrote an account of his visit to Laffite that was published in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* in 1847. After his return from Galveston, on 6 June 1820 McIntosh was appointed lieutenant on *U.S.S. Enterprise*, which he joined at Charleston. McIntosh remained in the Navy until 1857, retiring with the rank of captain. He died in 1860. His literary contribution in 1847 may have been influenced by his half-sister, Maria McIntosh (1803-1878), who was a successful author.

MADISON

John R. Madison was appointed midshipman in the U.S. Navy during the War of 1812 and made the

lieutenants' list on 24 July 1813 while serving on the frigate *Congress*. Early in 1818 he was appointed to the command of *U.S.S. Lynx*, a schooner purchased by the Navy for the purpose of interdicting pirates. Based at Charleston, *Lynx* made several cruises in the western Caribbean under Madison's command. In the fall of 1819, *Lynx* was ordered to New Orleans and dispatched on a special mission to Galveston Island, where Madison captured several pirates and exchanged letters with Jean Laffite during 5-10 November 1819. His superior, Commodore Daniel T. Patterson (1786-1839), declared that the correspondence was "both curious and upsetting" and Madison was subsequently embarrassed when the letters were made public. (Madison did not go ashore at Galveston but sent his volunteer, James McIntosh [1792-1860], to meet with the pirates.) *Lynx* continued to operate against pirates in the Gulf, cruising off Galveston Island during May and June 1820, and in the waters off Cuba later that year. On 21 January 1821, she departed the naval station at St. Mary's, Georgia, bound for Jamaica but was never seen again.

MITCHELL

A native of Bath, England, William Wilson Mitchell was born ca. 1784 and may have seen service in both the British and Spanish navies before coming to the Americas; it was also rumored that he had been one of the mutineers on board *H.M.S. Hermoine*. Mitchell's early career in the Gulf of Mexico is obscure, but he may have served in the militia defending New Orleans against the British in 1814-1815. He was first indicted for piracy at New Orleans in May 1815, when he was the master of a privateer sailing under a Cartagena letter-of-marque. During the evacuation of Cartagena in December 1815, Mitchell's schooner *Comet* is alleged to have carried away many of the refugees, including the governor, whom Mitchell subsequently robbed and marooned. *Comet* was captured by *U.S.S. Boxer* off the Balize in April 1816, but Mitchell turned up in Galveston a few months later. As late as the fall of 1819, he was reported

robbing vessels off Santiago de Cuba in a rowboat. A longtime associate of Pierre Laffite, he was master of the schooner *Pegasus* that carried Laffite from Galveston to New Orleans in March 1820. According to newspaper accounts, Mitchell died on 1 May 1821 on Great Corn Island, off the coast of Nicaragua. Printing the notice of his death, a Charleston newspaper reported that those who knew him best "say that many piracies have been charged to him which he did not commit, and that his purse was always open to the distressed."

PICORNELL

Juan Bautista Mariano de Picornell y Gomilla was born in Caracas in 1739 and was a practicing physician when he became a revolutionary in the 1790s. In 1797 he was a co-conspirator with Manuel Gaul and Jose Maria Espana in an unsuccessful plot to bring about a revolution in Venezuela. In 1813 he appeared in Philadelphia, where he was befriended by Ira Allen and became involved in the revolutionary plots against Texas. He was a colleague of the filibuster Jose Alvarez de Toledo (1799-1858), but after Toledo's defeat at the Battle of Medina River in 1813, Picornell withdrew to New Orleans, where late in 1813 he was elected president of the provincial government of the Interior Provinces of Mexico (Hombres Libres de la Provincias Internas de Mexico), with Pierre Laffite as a member of the council or junta. But he resigned the office on 12 February 1814 in order to seek reconciliation with the new Spanish government. (King Ferdinand VII, exiled by Napoleon in 1808, was restored to the throne in December 1813.) It was Dr. Picornell who recruited Pierre Laffite as a Spanish secret agent in 1815 and vouched for the Laffites' loyalty to King Ferdinand VII. He practiced medicine for several years and published a pamphlet on sanitary conditions in New Orleans in 1819, wherein he expressed his bitterness towards the city and its people. Picornell immigrated to Cuba, where he was a university professor at the time of his death in 1825.

SAUVINET

New Orleans merchant Joseph Sauvinet was born in Bayonne, France, and lived in Haiti before migrating to Louisiana in ca. 1804. He was a financier and a confidential friend of Edward Livingston. In a letter to Andrew Jackson written on Christmas Day 1814, Livingston referred to Sauvinet as "a very intelligent man long concerned in the contraband trade." On 16 July 1815, Sauvinet received the first privateer commission ever given by the Mexican Congress. During the summer and fall of 1816, Sauvinet was in contact with various revolutionaries in New Orleans. He was also a backer of Louis-Michel Aury's expedition to Galveston Island, a fact he imparted in a letter to the rebel leader Bernardo de Gutierrez on 15 August 1816. Sauvinet personally does not appear to have had any direct connection to the Laffite brothers - Lyle Saxon's portrayal of Sauvinet in *Lafitte the Pirate* is almost entirely fictionalized. His later career is not well documented. The Louisiana State Museum owns a portrait of him, painted by Jean Joseph Vaudenchamp ca. 1832.

TOLEDO

Jose Alvarez de Toledo y Dubois was born in Havana in 1799 and served as an officer in the Spanish Navy. Well known in liberal circles, he was elected as one of the deputies to the Spanish Cortez, where he was to represent the island of Santo Domingo, but his republican sympathies caused him to leave Cadiz with the assistance of the American consul. He surfaced in Philadelphia in September 1811 and set about lobbying U.S. government officials to gain support for a military expedition to liberate New Spain. It was at this time that he became associated with the Venezuelan revolutionary Juan Mariano Picornell (1739-1825) and the Mexican insurgent Jose Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara (1744-1841), who emerged as the co-commander, with William Augustus Magee (1789-183), of the rebel army that invaded Texas from Louisiana in August 1812. Toledo left Philadelphia in December 1812 and arrived in Natchitoches the following

April. With the assistance of American agents, he successfully conspired to oust Gutierrez from command of the rebel army. Under Toledo's leadership, the Republican Army of the North was destroyed by the royalists at the Battle of Medina River on 18 August 1813. Toledo escaped to Louisiana and arrived in New Orleans in early November 1814, where he was arrested and charged with violating U.S. neutrality. Released on his own recognizance, he participated in the Battle of New Orleans as a volunteer officer attached to Andrew Jackson's staff. Afterwards, his activities with the Mexican revolutionaries and Baratarians privateers led the U.S. attorney at New Orleans to prosecute Toledo for

planning illegal military expeditions against Spain. Once again, he was released on his own recognizance but failed to appear before the court--at the time, he was sailing to Boquilla de Piedras on board the Baratarian schooner *Petit Milan* to attend a conference with Mexican rebels. Toledo soon had a falling out with Humbert and the other filibusters and decided to abandon the Texas project. By the time he reached Washington, D.C., in August 1816, newspapers were reporting that he had been "purchased" by the royalists. In fact, Toledo was granted a full pardon by the king and entered government service as Madrid's expert on North American affairs. He died in 1858.

Continued from page 20

Many thanks to Jeff Modzelewski for his editing and verification of the translation of many documents from the Spanish versions over the past year and to Jean Epperson for all her help.

Research efforts continue and The Laffite Society will be updated as new information is uncovered. Assistance of any type is appreciated.

LAFFITE'S LEGACY

Gary Fretz

[Editor's Note:] Society member, Gary Fretz, has been doing much basic and difficult research on the Laffites. Many of us have been looking forward with eager anticipation to see what he is doing and finding. We pushed him to let us know through an item in the *Chronicles*. This article is a set of notes, brief sketches of his work and a request for assistance. We look forward to the full report when it is ready.

Participants in the profession of privateering in the early 1800's generally had short careers. Jean and Pierre Laffite were the exception in that they operated their perilous business for almost 20 years. They reached what seemed to be the pinnacle of success on more than one occasion only to lose everything. One would think that as clever as they were, some plans would have been made to retire and enjoy the fruits of their hard and dangerous work. Human nature is immutable--most people who lose everything once and make plans to ensure that it does not happen again. Because the Laffites could trust very few associates, their families would be the natural custodians of some hard assets. It is the goal of this research to identify some authentic Laffite descendants and to determine what happened to the legacy of the Laffites. What happened to their families? Was there any treasure passed on to them? Did they carry on the business?

According to the *Archdiocese of New Orleans Sacramental Records*, Jean and Pierre Laffite clearly had children with the Villars sisters. These "second generation American Laffites" and their baptism, marriage or birth dates were:

- **Pedro**, son of Jean Laffite and Catherine Villars, born November 4, 1815.
- **Catherine Coralie Laffite**, daughter of Pierre Laffite and Marie Louise Villars married Pierre Roup on March 19, 1825. I speculate that she was born outside of New Orleans, possibly in Pensacola, which is why we cannot find her birth records. The Rouns had two children.

- **Rose Villars**, born to Pierre Laffite and Marie Louise Villars on August 28, 1812. When Rose was baptized, one of her sponsors was Martin Lafitte, described as her brother.
- **Joseph Laffite**, born on May 2, 1821 to Pierre Laffite and Marie Louise Villars.
- **Jean Laffite**, born to Pierre Laffite and Marie Louise Villars on October 27, 1816.
- **Jean Baptiste Lafitte**, baptised May 20, 1811. The father's name is obscured and the mother's last name was Villars.
- **Manuel Lafitte** was born on January 10, 1818 with one parent listed as Louise (as in Marie Louise?) Lafitte but the father's name was obscured. This is probably another son of Pierre Laffite.

There may have been more children with other women. For example, we see an entry for the birth of **Marie Josephe Lafite**, daughter of Pierre Lafite and Adelaide Maselari on October 27, 1810. Miss Maselari was from Santo Domingo and Pierre is listed as being from Bayonne in France. Remember these last three words.

There was a **Pedro Lafitte** born to Pierre Lafitte, and Juana Delas in the marriage records. This Pedro Lafitte, Jr. married Maria Veret of Baracoa, Cuba on December 16, 1820. They had a daughter named Maria, born September 17, 1823.

Author Lyle Saxon stated that Marie Josephe Laffite and son Pierre (a.k.a. Pedro) were known to be living at the

home of Savinet, Laffite's attorney in 1830.

Daughter Rose, according to the *Sacramental Records*, married Andre Tessier and had five children with him in the New Orleans area. Their numerous descendants have now been tracked through the 1890's. A granddaughter of Rose, according to 1930's author Lyle Saxon, was involved in a lawsuit filed in New Orleans in 1920. Saxon opened the court records, discovered some descendants and claims they told him many "family stories" if he agreed to keep their identities secret. This secrecy was "necessary" because Rose was either an "octaroon" (had 1/8th Negro blood) or a "quadroon" (1/4 Negro). Even though she married a white man and all traces of the African-American heritage had disappeared in subsequent generations, her granddaughter was still classified as "Negro" on her birth certificate. This granddaughter had been a part of white New Orleans' high society and her new husband discovered this "scandalous" entry on her birth certificate. The granddaughter filed a lawsuit against the New Orleans Board of Health to have her birth certificate changed to "white" and lost. The husband was angry that she had not disclosed this fact before they were married, so he filed for divorce and won the divorce suit. At that time, it was illegal under Louisiana law for a white to marry a black. Research is being conducted now to find these same court records and authentic descendants. After intensive research, nothing corroborating Saxon's allegations has been found.

The rest of the Laffite "second generation" including the Villars sisters seem to disappear from the *U.S. Census, Marriage, Death and Sacramental Records* after 1831. Did they all succumb to disease at an early age? It is possible, but perhaps there is another explanation.

According to Cuban author Francisco Mota in his book *Pirates in the Caribbean* (submitted by Robert Vogel,

translated by Jeff Modzelewski), Pierre Laffite

found himself no less than in Havana, where he was hoping to collect part of the pay for their espionage, payment that had been authorized by a Spanish Royal Order on the 2nd of March, 1820. The Laffites planned to spend their final years in our capital. Here, in Havana, they had purchased a ranch situated in what is today the crossroads of Correa (Street) and Calzada de Jesus del Monte (Street), a place that for many years has maintained the legend that under its ground is hidden part of the treasure of these pirates....

An historian based in Baracoa, Cuba, Dr. Alejandro Hartmann Matos, advises that this area of Havana was indeed settled by wealthy French planters in those days. Throughout the 1800's, there were cafes and bakeries serving French food, French signage was common and French West Indian architecture prevailed.

So, under the theory that the Laffites took the compensation from their spying activities and purchased a Cuban "retirement ranch," new research was commissioned one year ago in the *Cuban National Archives*. The goal of this research is to confirm if the Laffites owned this plantation and to prove who the authentic descendants are. There is a significant number of Laffites living in Cuba today and some claim to be descended from the corsairs Jean and Pierre Laffite.

Unfortunately the present Cuban government restricts research into old property records and genealogy is viewed as "elitist". The property records are a sensitive subject because some plantations and homes were arbitrarily seized by the government in the 1960's. The government does not want this issue dredged up. So, we were denied access to the property records. Nevertheless, here is what we were able

to uncover in the other *Cuban National Archives* and through other sources.

- Francisco Mota, who wrote about the Laffites' purchase of the ranch near Havana, cited information from an earlier author, Jose L. Franco. Franco's best-known book is *Politica Continental Americana de Espana en Cuba* (Academy of Sciences of Cuba, 1947), which discussed Jean and Pierre Laffite, their descendants and Cuban connections. Franco said that Jean and Pierre Laffite were from the Oloron region of France near the Spanish border. The major seaport and largest city of this region is Bayonne. Remember, this is the city Pierre Laffite claimed as his birthplace when his daughter Marie Josephe was born. The Oloron region is about 50 miles south of Bordeaux, which is the other area the Laffites claimed to be from.

In another book by Jose Franco entitled *Historical Essays*, he states that:

- Jean and Pierre Laffite's children were sent to France for their education. Maybe this is why many of the "second generation" Laffites, including the Villars sisters, disappeared from New Orleans?
- Jean Laffite was murdered on the coast of Cuba in 1825. (This assertion does not agree with the other more recently accepted theories of his demise).
- The children of the Laffites then moved to Cuba from France. Some "friends of the Laffites" recovered some "goods of the pirates" and the children were "settled in Havana". In one context, it may be interpreted that these "goods of the pirates" were used to financially support the children.
- The descendants of the Laffites were living in or near Havana at the time Franco was writing his book.

Additional information has come to light from a different source. There is a *Vilma Laffite* living in Havana today (at 3102 30th Street) in the beach area, who claims to be a great-great granddaughter of the corsairs. She claims descent through a Juan/Jean Laffite born in 1818 to either Jean or Pierre Laffite but she, so far, cannot prove this connection. Could this Juan Laffite be the son of Pierre born in 1816 (and not 1818 as Vilma says) as noted in the *New Orleans Sacramental Records*? According to Vilma, this Juan Laffite married Eugenia Laffite who had a son named Adrian Laffite. Adrian's son, Vilma's grandfather, was Alfonso Laffite and he was a prominent planter in the province of Havana. Vilma's aunts Maria Luisa Laffite and Olga Laffite now live in Miami. Remember that "Maria Luisa" Villars was the name of Pierre Laffite's mistress who may be the ancestor of Vilma.

In April, 1820, 459 French colonists with 122 children arrived in Havana, Cuba to inhabit some new French real estate developments. The streets had just been laid out and houses were under construction. Twenty-eight colonists were from New Orleans and twelve were from other parts of Louisiana. A Jean Laffite was listed as a property owner but the specific location of his property is not given nor is his origin. The French settlements were located in several different areas of Cuba including Cienfuegos on the south coast and Caunao in the north central region. The Cuanao River empties on the north coast near the islands where Jean Laffite was known to anchor in the spring of 1822. (This information is from the *Cuban National Archives, Gobierno Superior Civil, leg. 133, no. 19,998 and leg. 630, no. 19,892*).

Two other independent sources place Laffite in this area at this time. The Governor of Puerto Principe, in his regular communique to the central government in Havana, reported on March 19, 1822, that Jean Laffite and 30 men were anchored at Rincon Grande in a two-masted vessel. Then Captain Stockton of the *U.S.S. Alligator*,

in the *Louisiana Gazette* (June 18, 1822), reported that Laffite plundered the American sloop *Jayon* April 11th near Xibara. So, perhaps Laffite's "retirement ranch" and "safe-house" was in this area and he also had property closer to Havana?

Cuban Ministry of Finance Records state that in 1836 a Juan Bautista (Jean Baptiste) Laffite was established as a merchant in Havana. Could this Juan Bautista be the same "second generation" Jean Baptiste Laffite born in New Orleans? In 1855, Juan Bautista Laffite's business failed and a nephew named Juan Laffite, "a native of Paris, filed a claim as a creditor in the bankruptcy proceeding". (*Ministry of Finance - Clerk's Office, Legajo 213, no. 15 in the Cuban National Archives*). Maybe this Juan, who was labeled as a "native of Paris", was actually the Juan who was born in New Orleans and sent to Paris for his education?

Our research has also uncovered a number of subsequent Laffite marriages and births in Cuba and New Orleans during the 1850-1890 era. If we can prove an undisputed link to our Jean or Pierre Laffite then we will establish a list of descendants and publish this. But for now, this is all we have.

The following timeline-summary of the activities of the Laffites in their final years is presented to correlate the new Cuban research results with what we knew previously. This information is from primary-source contemporaneous newspaper articles and government reports.

The Final Years of Jean and Pierre Laffite

- After the Laffites sailed away from Galveston for the last time in May, 1820, they were known to be operating in the Isla Mujeres, Yucatan, Mexico area. This strategic location was excellent for intercepting the smaller, more vulnerable treasure-laden Spanish ships sailing from Vera Cruz to Havana. This was a time when

Spain and France were at war and the larger armed vessels and many Spanish troops were called back to Spain to defend the motherland. Because the colonies were stripped of troops and ships, the South American Independence movements were energized and the services of privateers were in demand.

Here is what we know or think we know of the last years of the corsairs:

- The *Archives of the Indies* in Seville (*Independence of the Spanish Colonies* files, catalogue 3886, report dated January 18, 1821) state that the corsair Jean Laffite had captured the merchant frigate *Castor Limena* on August 12, 1820 off the coast of Vera Cruz, Mexico. The Spanish sent a "posse" after Laffite and recaptured the *Castor Limena*.
- Pierre Laffite was encountered on the beach at the north tip of Isla Mujeres on September 5, 1821 by a Mr. Fisher, the marooned mate of the schooner *Evergreen* which was reported in the *Louisiana Gazette*, March 14, 1822. Laffite gave the wounded Mr. Fisher shelter and "appeared to have considerable authority over the other privateersmen".
- Pierre Laffite died after a gunfight on the island of Cancun between his band of privateers and Mexican Royalist forces on November 9, 1821. Pierre's body was brought to the village of Dzilam by George Schumph, Laffite's armorer, and buried by a priest named Don Jose Gregorio Cervera. Pierre's consort, Lucy, was supposedly pregnant with Pierre's child. She later gave birth and Pierre's descendants supposedly still live in the Dzilam area. Depositions of Schumph, who was suspected as a revolutionary activist, were taken by the Mexican authorities just after Laffite's death, so we

have many details about Pierre's last days.

Meanwhile, Jean Laffite was busy working his trade around the coast of Cuba. In January, 1822, Laffite's fleet was destroyed by an English brig. He swam to shore near Santa Cruz de Sur and was jailed in Puerto Principe for several weeks. Laffite was later sent to the hospital in San Juan de Dios. On February 13, 1822, after faking a serious illness, he escaped from the hospital and fled to the Camagueyan coast. This has been documented in several newspapers including the *Louisiana Gazette* of November 29, 1822.

On March 19, 1822 the Governor of Puerto Principe reported that Jean Laffite was anchored in a small two-masted vessel with 30 men in the anchorage of Rincon Grande, one league from Viaro, adjacent to Boca Carabela (on the north-central coast of Cuba).

On April 13, 1822, Captain Stockton of the *USS Alligator* reported that "the famous Laffite" plundered the American sloop named *Jay* two days earlier on the north coast of Cuba (according to the *Louisiana Gazette*, June 18, 1822). Laffite was seen with a group of four ships including the Colombian privateering schooner named *Cienego* on April 11th. The *Alligator* later captured the *Cienego* off Nuevitas. The pirates were then reported to be taking refuge in Xibara and the local governors along the north coast were said to be giving protection to the corsairs. It seems that whenever the U.S. or British anti-pirate squadrons gave chase, the corsairs would simply flee to a friendly village ashore. The corsairs were selling their goods at deep discounts to the locals and this is why they were warmly welcomed in the small villages away from Havana. Since it was against

international law for the U.S. or British naval forces to land on Cuban soil without permission, the corsairs had a viable survival plan as long as they could outrun their pursuers.

According to the Colombian Secretary of War and Marine, Tomo 1265, Folio 3, The Colombian schooner *General Santander* sailed from Santiago de Cuba to Cartagena by way of Curacao on May 28, 1822. There were thousands of French refugees living in Santiago and it was known as a haven for French corsairs. This researcher speculates that Jean Laffite escaped from Cuba on this voyage from Santiago and arrived in Colombia on June 11, 1822. Since Laffite had lost all his large ships, he knew that Colombia was the best place to gain a privateering captain's appointment in the fight against Spain.

This same *General Santander*, which Jean Laffite assumed command of, received her privateer's Letter of Marque on August 19, 1822 in Cartagena, Colombia. (*Gaceta de Colombia*, December 1, 1822).

On November 26, 1822, 60 miles west of Grand Cayman Island, Laffite's Colombian armed schooner, the *General Santander* encountered the American schooner *Columbus Ross*. Laffite told the American captain he "had departed from Cartagena 95 days earlier (August 20, 1822) and captured two Spanish ships recently". One of these prizes was sent back to Cartagena for adjudication. Laffite escorted the schooner *Columbus Ross*, sailing from Jamaica to New Orleans, for two days. The American was treated "with the greatest politeness" and Laffite provided "protection against pirates" for the American ship as they sailed through the Yucatan Straits. When the American captain

admitted that he had no armament, Laffite generously gave him thirty 4-pound cannonballs and a brass 4-pound gun on a pivot. (*Independent Chronicle and Boston Patriot of January 25, 1823*).

The Last Voyage of Jean Laffite:

- In the *Gaceta de Colombia*, April 20, 1823 (and in the *Gaceta de Cartagena*, no. 63), Jean Laffite's demise is chronicled. This article was translated by Paula Covington, the Latin American and Iberian bibliographer with Vanderbilt University. Thanks to Ms. Covington for helping to find this newspaper article in her collection. (*My explanations and clarifications are in parentheses*).

Naval Combat

The Colombian corsair *General Santander*, a 43-ton schooner under the command of Captain Jean Laffite gave chase at 5:00am on February 4th, when she was 20 leagues off the fort of Omoa (*Honduras*) and the Triumph of the Cross (*a monument nearby*), to a brig schooner and a Spanish schooner until 10:00pm. The schooner brig, after an hour of combat and close to surrendering, made signals with lanterns to the schooner which immediately turned on the corsair. At this time, Captain Laffite, mortally wounded, rallied his crew and passed command of the ship to his second-in-command who suffered the same fate. The third-in-command, Francisco Similien, after the death of the second-in-command, continued combat until 1:00am and because it was impossible to continue, he turned the ship about. The two Spanish ships did the same who, without a doubt, were very damaged by the corsair's shots. The loss of this brave naval officer is moving, and the boldness with which he confronted the superior forces that attacked him, demonstrates the tremendous honor that follows him into death. The schooner brig had aboard

twelve cannons and the brig had six with a 16-pounder in the rear.

Comments:

- My speculation: Laffite's mistake was that he mis-judged the amount of armament on one of the Spanish ships. Most merchant ships of that era had a single small gun mounted on the stern to shoot at pursuers. This Spanish schooner brig had twelve cannons. Under the veil of darkness on the high seas and in heavy winds it can be difficult to assess an adversary's firepower.
- Omoa is the site of the largest Spanish fort in Latin America. It was originally built to protect shipments of silver from the mines at Tegucigalpa, Honduras. In Laffite's day, this fort was at the edge of the beach but today the beach has accreted out several hundred yards so the fort is now a long walk to the beach. Corsairs would typically patrol the sea lanes off Omoa, out of range of the fort's cannons.
- It is not known what happened to Jean Laffite's body but he was probably "buried at sea". It was also customary at that time to preserve the corpse of a famous person in a barrel of rum until the vessel reached home and a proper funeral could take place.
- The *General Santander* cleared into the port of Porto Bello, Panama on March 10, 1823, on their way back to Cartagena, according to naval records in the *Colombian National Archives* (AGN) and Francisco Similien was noted to be in command at that time.

A researcher will travel to Havana in February, 2003 and appeal to the Cuban government for access to the property records. If anyone can add to this information or is in a position to help us in the research, then any assistance is appreciated.³

Continued on page 14

ONE MAN'S DEATH SPARKS U.S. WAR AGAINST PIRACY IN 1822

Pam Keyes

A high level of current interest in activities of the Laffites after they left Galveston prompted a search of late issues of the 1822 *National Advocate* (New York).¹ This newspaper yields the story of the *USS Alligator* and her commander, Lt. William H. Allen, whose death during a battle with pirates off Cuba inflamed Americans causing the United States to declare an all-out war against piracy in the West Indies in late December, 1822. The aftermath of this man's death no doubt caused considerable problems for Jean Laffite and other Colombian corsairs in the Gulf. Strangely, although the death of the highly venerated Lt. Allen touched off a war, little has been written about him since. What follows is an early 19th century version of the 20th century Cuban crisis, involving pirates who preyed on ships in the Cuban and Florida waters.

Several different pirates, mostly of Spanish origin, had been plaguing the Gulf Coast near Florida and Cuba for years, but the activity intensified to a fever pitch during the summer and fall of 1822. This activity culminated on November 9 when the *USS Alligator*, a 198-ton schooner commanded by rising naval star, Lt. William H. Allen, successfully attacked a nest of Cuban pirates off Matanzas. Lt. Allen was mortally wounded by shots to the head and chest but survived for four hours. This one officer's untimely death sparked a fury among the American public that has not been seen since.

The *Alligator* didn't go to the Matanzas area seeking a battle, although she was part of the US West Indies Squadron. Lt. Allen and his crew were escorting a couple of American ship masters to Havana so they could raise money for the ransom of their vessels and two other Americans who had been captured earlier by two piratical schooners near Key Romain. On arriving near Matanzas, Lt. Allen learned the pirates responsible for capture of the two vessels were nearby in the channel, along with several captured prizes. The *Alligator* drew too much water to clear the channel, so two boats were manned by Lt. Allen and his men; their intent was to board the suspected main pirate vessel. The

battle began and although Allen was critically wounded early in the fray, he remained alert urging his men to "do their duty." After a short contest, the pirates abandoned their vessels and swam to shore. Their vessels were captured by the *Alligator* and escorted into Matanzas. Each of the captured pirate vessels had one gun amidships, with 40 well-armed men, and considerable plunder on board.

The *Alligator's* losses in addition to Lt. Allen were two of her sailors killed, and three crew members badly wounded. The pirates lost several men in the battle and others drowned endeavoring to escape.

Lt. Allen was buried with full military honors at Matanzas. In a letter from Matanzas published in the Cuban papers, F. Adams wrote:

*The gallant Allen is no more!...He arrived just in time to save five sail of vessels, which he found in possession of a gang of pirates, 300 strong, established in the Bay of Lejuapo... (he was) attacking their principal vessel, a fine schooner of about 80 tons, with a long 18 pounder on a pivot, and 4 smaller guns, with the bloody flag nailed to the mast...it is certain that the pirates are but little weakened by this contest, and there is reason to fear that our commerce with this island (Cuba) and New Orleans will be almost annihilated, unless an effectual force is stationed here to prevent it.*²

Due to long traveling distances, news was slow to reach Washington and New York from Cuba, and the dispatches about the *Alligator's* battle and Allen's death were not published in the *National Advocate* until November 30--21 days after the event occurred. Deeply stung and shocked by this fatal attack on a US naval officer in Spanish territory, American authorities in Washington acted quickly. Within a month and a half, Congress authorized a bill against piracy in the West Indies and appropriated \$160,000 for the construction and outfitting of steam vessels for the suppression of

piracy, under the leadership of veteran mariner Commodore David Porter, who resigned his post in the Board of Navy Commissioners in order to accept the job.³

The depth of public sentiment in the United States at the time may be seen in this excerpt of a speech made by Mr. Condict of New Jersey before the House of Representatives:

The premature death of the gallant and lamented Allen has excited a spirit of indignation though out our calls loudly for retributive justice from the lawless barbarians...The most effective restraint which you can impose upon the barbarities is to furnish to them the spectacle of a few dozen of their leaders suspended by the halter, from the yard-arms of some of our public ships.

Spanish sentiment in Cuba was not so touched. In the December 5th *National Advocate*, an article from the *Charleston Courier* was cited in which it said:

The death of Capt. Allen was received and published at Havana on Nov. 14. The American vessels in port immediately hoisted their colors half mast and were followed by vessels of every other nation in port, except the Spanish! The piratical vessel taken by the Alligator was well known to have been fitted out at Regla, in the harbor of Havana. This accounts for their not regretting the loss of Capt. Allen.

Lt. Allen's fellow naval officers demonstrated their feelings about the matter by wearing black crepe on the left arm for 30 days:

In testimony of the high respect entertained for their late brother...whose private worth and professional skill endeared him to all, and whose untimely fate will long be remembered and lamented as a public calamity by his friends and countrymen.⁴

In an odd twist of fate, Lt. Allen's own ship, the *Alligator*, did not survive him by many days. On November 19 while convoying the five former prize ships back to the US, the *Alligator* foundered on Caryford Reef in the Upper Keys. Despite all efforts to dislodge the vessel, nothing could be done, so the

crew set her on fire November 23 and sunk her rather than let pirates salvage the ship. Her coral-encrusted wreck may still be seen by divers off Alligator Reef near Florida. The Alligator Lighthouse nearby was created to help other ships avoid the pirate-hunting schooner's fate.⁵ To pursue the war against piracy, the US built four special steamships at a cost of \$40,000 each. The necessity of building the special "pirate hunter" vessels was delineated succinctly in this editorial on piracy and solutions to the problem in the December 13, 1822, *National Advocate*:

Two or four steam vessels of war kept cruising on that line of coast (Florida and Cuba), drawing about six feet of water, and alternately relieved, will afford a permanent exemption from piratical depredations...A steam brig of 250 tons, mounting a 24-pounder on a swivel or pivot, and 6 small guns, and manned with 50 men, can carry sufficient coal for a cruise of 20 days; and coal can be sent to neighboring ports for a constant supply. A steam vessel can overtake a pirate in any weather, with any wind, and on any tack; can fight any force take any position, and keep off boarding by throwing hot water from her engine.

If information that a pirate is in the neighborhood reaches a ship of war, she has to encounter currents, adverse winds, and other delays, which afford time for the pirate to escape. Not so with a steam vessel: she reaches the pirate, or cuts off his retreat in 24 hours after learning the latitude where the pirate cruizes.

Order one steam vessel to cruise for a week between Cape St. Antoine and the Tortugas; another to stretch off and on the Florida Gulf and the Great Bahama Bank; keep a third to the windward of Cuba, and the fourth off Havana and Nicholas Channel, alternately relieving each other, and changing their cruising grounds, and they cannot fail to intercept every piratical vessel; and at a trifling cost will be a permanent and secure guarda costas, and worth all the frigates in the world.

Commodore Porter went to work with his West Indies Anti-Piracy Squadron in early 1823, operating from a base in the Key West area. He and his ships soon had the pirates nicely swept from the seas, but his over-vigilance in pursuit landed him a court martial after he seized a fort in Fajardo, Puerto Rico, because it had sheltered pirates. Naval authorities said he had been involved in hostile acts against a friendly power (Spain). Porter received a light sentence.⁶

After Porter's squadron rid the Gulf of pirates, a new industry emerged, based largely in the area of Key West: wrecking. Unlike piracy, this was legal and regulated, with men rescuing or salvaging ships stranded on the reefs. These "wreckers" earned a percentage of the salvaged cargo similar what the former pirate crews got from their captains. Piracy had adapted to the times.

Endnotes

1. Laffite Society member and author, Pam Keyes, purchased a batch of 1822 *National Advocate* newspapers that were the personal copies of then

Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, as noted near the mastheads in writing. They represent quite an historic account of the war against piracy. This batch of 100 papers came out of the collection of the Library of Congress. This article grew out of this interesting collection.

2. *National Advocate*, (November 30, 1822).
4. Congress appropriation, *National Advocate*, (December 17, 1822).

Porter resigned, *National Advocate*, (December 12, 1822).

4. *National Advocate*, (December 9, 1822).
5. Both the Alligator Lighthouse and Alligator Reef were named after the ship.
6. Commodore Porter received a six month suspension following the 1825 court martial. Particulars about his court martial are in Robert Beale's "A Report of the Trial of Commodore David Porter of the Navy of the United States, before a General Court Martial Held at Washington in July, 1825" Washington City, 1825.

MAISON ROUGE ARTIFACT ANALYSIS

R. Dale Olson

On Saturday 10 January 2003, and again on Saturday 17 January, 122 boxes of archaeological materials taken from the legendary site of Laffite's "Maison Rouge" were examined by 12 members of the Houston Archaeological Society (HAS). The material was uncovered in 1984 during the first of two formal archaeological excavations at the site located at 1417 Avenue A on Galveston Island.

Following the excavation, the materials were removed to the Department of Archaeology at the University of Houston. Over the years several graduate students planned analysis as a basis for their advanced degrees in archaeology. No thesis or dissertation was ever completed, and the boxes of artifacts remained stored at the University of Houston for many years.

Years later, several members of the Laffite Society retrieved the materials from the University, which no longer had space for storage, and relocated them to Galveston Island for storage.

The site at 1417 Avenue A has long been owned by Society members R. Dale and Diane Olson, so the archaeological artifacts became their property. Sheldon Kindal, President of the HAS organized the research effort this past January and recruited fellow archaeologists to assist in sorting the materials. Boxes were emptied one at a time with members cooperatively arriving at a "keep or discard" decision. Materials that appear to have significance were retained for cleaning and later accurate analysis by experts, and those with no obvious importance were stored for later reburial at the Maison Rouge site.

Unfortunately, no materials from "Level V", the depth at which Laffite era material would be expected to reside,

were retrieved from the University of Houston. Over the many years of storage at the school, many students had access to the artifacts, and the location of the Level V material is unknown.

Little archaeological evidence directly connecting Jean or Pierre Laffite to the site has thus far been uncovered. There is however, an abundance of historical information which strongly suggests that the Laffite settlement included the site at 1417 Avenue A, and it is expected that some archaeological evidence will be established to link the site to an occupancy during the Laffite era, 1817-1820.

During the January, 2003 analysis workshop a large number of bottles in excellent condition were cataloged. Buttons, bone, numerous pieces of ceramics, an 1867 Indian Head U.S. Penny, and various other artifacts were taken for analysis.

On Saturday January 25, the archaeological crew retrieved the material deemed of little value and reburied the contents in two large trenches on the site of Maison Rouge. One pit was dug in an old cistern located on the East boundary of the site, approximately midway between the remnants of the old foundation and the alley. The second trench was dug immediately on the West side of the cistern, and adjoined its wall. Both pits were approximately five feet in depth.

Upon completion of the analysis, the archaeological work on the site will be complete. Remaining, and of considerable interest, is the possible excavation of at least one more pit to attempt retrieval of artifacts from the Level V depth. Also, Society Members continue to ascertain the location of the Level V material taken in the 1984 excavation.

RESCUING PIERRE BOIT LAFFITTE

Don C. Marler

An official Louisiana Historic Marker has caused some public interest lately. The marker stands in Ms. Alice B. Prudhomme's front yard. She is a member of the De Soto Parish Historical Society, and lives in Mansfield, Louisiana. Passerbys frequently ask, "What are you doing with a historic marker in your front yard?" She replies, "The marker is for my ancestor, Pierre Boit Laffitte, and I rescued it from a junk dealer." The marker erected in 1955 near the Carmel Catholic Church in De Soto Parish reads:

*Pierre Boit Laffitte [sic] Grave of
Pierre Boit Laffitte, son of pirate
Pierre Laffitte, hero in defense of New
Orleans against British in 1815. He
owned an 11,963 acre grant.
A community, lake and river were
named for him.*

The marker is wrong on several accounts remarked Ms. Prudhomme and continued with her narrative. The marker disappeared years ago from its original location and she heard in 1999 that a historical marker was to be auctioned in Shreveport. She called a lady friend and they went to the auction house in her small car. There, to her surprise, was Pierre Boit, her ancestor's marker. The owner appeared and very

politely explained that he had found the marker in the weeds near a shop that he owned on Greenwood Road. He had put it in his shop and it had been there for about 10 years and he had just decided to sell it. The ladies explained that they intended to take Pierre (the marker) home with them without bidding or buying it. The owner agreed. The ladies struggled with the huge, heavy marker in the trunk of their little car unable to close the lid. Their transportation problems lasted for some time but the marker was finally deposited in Ms Prudhomme's front yard where it remains.

Ms. Prudhomme states that the father of Pierre Boitt Laffitte was Paul Boitt Laffitte, an early settler of Bayou Pierre, and not Pierre Laffite the pirate. She hopes to get a corrected marker for her ancestor placed in the original location near his grave. Meanwhile the old marker attracts considerable attention in her front yard.

Notes

Alice Bates Prudhomme, "Rescuing Pierre Boitt Laffitte" *The Plume- De Soto Parish Historical Magazine*, (Fall 2000).

Private communication, January 2003, with Ms. Alice Bates Prudhomme.

CALENDAR

General meetings of The Laffite Society are held on the third Tuesday of each month at 6:00 p.m. at the Trolley stop Building (on the south side of the 2000 block of The Strand, Galveston, TX., 77550. Many of the meetings feature interesting and informative presentations by members or guest speakers. The exception is the December meeting, the annual "Holiday Social," which is an evening of food, drink, and entertaining conversation in a relaxed and festive setting.

Board of Directors meetings are scheduled for the first month of each calendar quarter (January, April, July, and October) on the same day as that month's general meeting and normally either precede or follow same. Additional Board of Directors meetings may be scheduled at the Board's discretion.

In addition to the general meetings, one or more special events are normally scheduled during the year. Examples of such special events which have taken place in the past include: an excursion to Grande Terre, Louisiana (Laffite's "Barataria"), the address of the Society's then-President, R. Dale Olson, to the Louisiana Historical Society at the New Orleans Country Club, and a summer archaeological excavation at the supposed site of Laffite's Maison Rouge.

Inquiries about upcoming special events may be directed to The Laffite Society, P.O. Box 1325, Galveston, Tx., 77553, or consult the webpage at: thelaffitesociety.com and the newsgroup at: laffite@yahoogroups.com.

The Laffite Society attempts to mail information (snail mail or email) to members and interested parties on the Society's mailing list as special event details are determined.

The *Laffite Society Chronicles* are published two times per year-in the spring and fall. The publication schedule is not always kept precisely.

Bulletin Board

Check out *No Quarter Given* which is a journal now added regularly to our archives. It has some substantial articles on pirates. You may even want to subscribe.

New Members

David Bowers - 1/21/2003
1400 Rosenberg
Galveston, TX 77550

Daniel Cote - 12/29/2002
29 Lakeview Dr
Galveston, TX 77551

Marsh and Grace Davis - 1/21/2003
1329 24th Street
Galveston, TX 77550

Arthur Kennedy - 12/15/2002
2523 Ave O
Galveston, TX 77550

John Moen - 12/21/2002
Chris Woolwine-Moen
1124 Redfish
Bayou Vista, TX 77563

Charles Ward - 12/15/2002
6315 Central City Blvd #817
Galveston, TX 77551

**THE LAFFITE SOCIETY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

AUGUST 2002-JULY 2004

PRESIDENTJEFFERY MODZELEWSKI
FIRST VICE PRESIDENTJIM NONUS
SECOND VICE PRESIDENTMIKE EUBANK
THIRD VICE PRESIDENTKATHY MODZELEWSKI
RECORDING/CORRESPONDING SECRETARYDOROTHY MCD. KARILANOVIC
TREASURERJERRY EUBANK
ARCHIVIST[VACANT]
PARLIAMENTARIANDIANE OLSON
COORDINATOR OF RESEARCHPAM KEYES
HISTORIANJEAN L. EPPERSON
EDITOR OF PUBLICATIONSDON C. MARLER
PRESS DIRECTORDAVE ROBERTS

ADVISORY BOARD

PAM KEYES R.
ROBERT LOOPER
GENE MARSHALL

DALE OLSON
ROBERT VOGEL
REGINALD WILSON

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

The Laffite Society is a not-for-profit organization devoted to the study of the privateers Jean and Pierre Laffite and their contemporaries, and to the geographical locales and chronological era associated with them.

Annual dues are as follows:

Student.....	\$15.00
Senior (Over 65).....	15.00
Institution.....	15.00
Individual.....	30.00
Family.....	35.00
Sustaining Member.....	100.00
Life Membership (One Payment)	350.00