

The Laffite Study Group Newsletter

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PAM KEYES
Editor

LHA Meeting a Success

The Louisiana Historical Association held its 1982 annual meeting at Lake Charles on March 4-6. There were several sessions and numerous interesting papers. Subjects of papers ranged from a history of the New Orleans Police Department to the underwater archaeology of the El Nuevo Constanste, a Spanish merchantman wrecked off Cameron Parish in 1766.

"Jean Laffite and Contraband: Southwest Louisiana Folklore" was the Saturday, March 6, afternoon session. Robert B. Coleman, president of Lake Charles' Contraband Days Festival (1982) presided over the session, which consisted of papers by the LSG's president, Sir Jack D.L. Holmes, and LTJL managing editor Robert C. Vogel. Holmes' paper, "Contraband Days: A Lake Charles' Tradition" was an animated, entertaining digression on local "fake-lore" and "folk-lore." Vogel's paper, "The Laffite Journal: History or Hoax?" challenged the validity of the John A. Laflin-Laffite collection of papers and attempted to debunk the published Journal of Jean Laffite as a clumsy hoax. Gerard Sellers, well known to members of the LSG for his recent study of Louisiana's chenier culture and the exhibit "Islands of the Marsh," provided commentary on both papers and offered a potpourri of southwestern Louisiana Laffite stories. The session was one of the best attended of this year's LHA meetings; the question and answer session following the papers generated considerable discussion. The Laffite session also received its share of media attention, both electronic and print.

Perhaps the highlight of the

Laffite papers session occurred when Dr. Tom Watson, of McNeese State University in Lake Charles, came to the podium and proceeded to baptise Sir Jack with water from Contraband Bayou. Vogel and Mlle. Sylvie-Beatrice Robin also were presented with bottles of water "smuggled" out of Contraband Bayou, in addition to "Coonass" passports, granting us dual citizenship in the Territory of Louisiana.

Mlle. Robin, a graduate student at the University of Paris, where she is writing a major paper on Laffite's role in the Mexican war of independence, journeyed from New Orleans to Lake Charles to take in the LHA meetings and seek out Laffite aficionados. During the conference, Sir Jack Holmes and Robert Vogel announced that Tom Watson and Sylvie Robin had been appointed to the LSG Executive Board -- it was indeed Dr. Watson's time to shine, as he also was elected vice president of the LHA.

After the meetings were over, Dr. Watson, Sellers, Holmes and Vogel, with Mlle. Robin in tow, embarked upon a memorable Saturday night of crawfish, honkytonkin', and beer around the environs of Lake Charles. The following day, after a motorboat ride down Bayou Contraband, Sellers cooked up a batch of alligator in sauce picante in Mrs. Watson's kitchen. Delicious!

All in all, it was an extraordinary LHA conference. The LSG received a lot of good press and considerable recognition. Conversation at the various luncheons and parties frequently settled on Jean Laffite. It was a memorable weekend -- we look forward to repeating it next year at Hammond.

Parisian Researches Laffite

This will introduce you to Sylvie-Beatrice-Robin, my friend and colleague from the University of Paris. Mademoiselle Robin took her baccalaureate in Spanish at the University of Paris, X Nanterre, in 1981, and is presently completing work on her master's at the same institution. Part of her academic program is a study of the role of French privateersmen in Mexico's war of independence. She was recently in Louisiana and Texas to research the careers of Jean Laffite, Louis Aury, Amable Humbert, et al, and to attend the annual meeting of the Louisiana Historical Association in Lake Charles.

In March, 1982, President Sir Jack D.L. Holmes appointed Sylvie Robin to the Board of Directors of the Laffite Study Group. She returned to France in May and hopes to come back to Louisiana for next spring's LHA-LSG meetings in Hammond.

— Robert C. Vogel
Managing Editor
LTJL

Enfin une compatriote de Jean Laffite fait partie du L.S.G. Permettez-moi de vous la présenter. Son nom: Sylvie Robin. Elle habite la Région Parisienne et viens d'obtenir ses licences d'espagnol et de Langues Etrangères Appliquées à l'université de Paris X Nanterre.

Comment est-elle arrivée au LSG? Par un heureux hasard et une longue histoire d'amour avec la Louisiane. Elle avait décidé d'écrire ses mémoires de Maîtrise (diplôme de 4ème année d'université) sur le sympathique pays des Bayous. L'un serait donc sur le bilinguisme en Louisiane, quant à l'autre, celui pour le diplôme d'espagnol, il devait avoir un rapport avec le pays de Don Quichotte:

Jean Laffite, personnage pourtant peu connu en France, et en tout cas moins apprécié par son pays d'origine que par sa patrie d'adoption. Preuve en sont les livres qui le mentionnent, ils se comptent sur les doigts de la main. Un livre de Lyle Saxon: Lafitte le pirate, une thèse de 400 pages, écrite par Jacques Penot sur Les relations entre la France et la Mexique de 1808 à 1840 dans laquelle l'auteur con-

sacre 15 pages à Laffite et aux pirates de Galveston; une très séduisante Histoire de la flibuste par George Blond, qui nous présente Laffite comme "le génie flibustier du Golfe du Mexique" et le dernier grand seigneur des caraïbes. Sans doute existe-il d'autres livres dont nous n'aurions pas connaissance, mais ils ne peuvent être nombreux.

Cette légère littérature permet néanmoins de se rendre compte que Laffite n'est pas uniquement le personnage historique de la Nouvelle Orléans, ni le "Boss" de Barataria, mais aussi l'agent 13-2 des services secrets espagnols, Pierre Laffite étant le 13-1. En aucun cas cela ne les empêcha de se déclarer solidaires du gouvernement indépendant du Mexique et de travailler en fait, pour leur seul compte depuis leur base de Galveston, causant d'irréparables dommages à la flotte espagnole.

Voilà un bon sujet de mémoire! Laffite et les français de Galveston: leur rôle dans la lutte d'indépendance du Mexique. Ce sujet serait même une mine d'or que cette étudiante s'est décidée à creuser, avec l'aide des membres du LSG, en particulier celle de Robert Vogel et de Sir Jack Holmes, et de son Directeur de Maîtrise, C.A. Jézéquel, en France.

Des archives se trouveraient au Texas, au Mexique, à la Havane, en Espagne et même à Paris! Peut-être ne pourra-t-elle pas aller partout, mais faites lui confiance, elle dépensera beaucoup d'énergie, et, consciente de n'être qu'un membre du LSG parmi quelque 200 autres, elle vous tiendra au courant de ses recherches (en quelle langue la prochaine fois?).

Rare Books for the Collector

Caravan-Maritime Books, 87-06 168th Place, Jamaica, N.Y. 11432 offers a huge selection of rare and out-of-print books.

A few books which might prove interesting to a researcher are:

Smuggling Days and Smuggling Ways: or The Story of a Lost Art. Henry N. Shore, London, 1892.\$115.

Histoire Illustree Des Pirates, Corsaires, Flibustiers, Boucaniers, Forbans, Negriers & Ecumeurs De Mer. Jules Trousett, Paris, circa 1875. ...\$55.

Memberships, Etc.

A proposed meeting of the LSG is slated to coincide with the March, 1983, meeting of the Louisiana Historical Association in Hammond, La.

Papers concerning studies relevant to a proposed session on "Privateers and Filibusters on the Louisiana Coast, 1812-1820" are invited. Persons with papers or persons desiring more information about the session may contact either Sir Jack D.L. Holmes, 520 South 22nd Ave., Birmingham, Ala., 35205, or Robert C. Vogel (address given later in this article).

* * *

Persons interested in the old South, smuggling, Gulf Coast privateers and other aspects of Laffite study are encouraged to join the Laffite Study Group.

Founded in 1975 by Robert C. Vogel, the Laffite Study Group is

devoted to the study of Jean Laffite's role in history, folklore and literature.

As a member, you will receive the quarterly Laffite Study Group Newsletter and the irregularly published Life and Times of Jean Laffite, a journal of notes and papers.

Dues for the LSG are: \$6 for individuals and institutions; \$20 for sustaining and \$100 for life memberships. Dues should be sent to John Howells, LSG treasurer, 2570 Kevin Lane, Houston, Texas 77043.

Submissions for the LSG Newsletter should be no longer than 700 words and should be sent to Pam Keyes, Editor, LSG Newsletter, 320 "I" N.W., Miami, OK 74354.

Longer items, such as papers, may be used in the Life and Times of Jean Laffite. Such items should be sent to Robert C. Vogel, Editor, 6971 Homestead Ave., So., Cottage Grove, Minn., 55016

New Members

Powell A. Casey
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Wallisville Heritage Park
Foundation
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JAZZ MAGAZINE RELATES TALE OF LAFFITE AND PLANTATION

Mention is made of Jean Iaffite's slave-dealing in a historically thorough article on Magnolia Plantation in the Spring, 1982 issue of "The Second Line," magazine of the New Orleans Jazz Club.

Titled "Magnolia Plantation - History and Music," by Karl Koeing, Ph.D., the article states that Mrs. Johnson, wife of one-time Magnolia owner William Johnson, had seen Jean Iaffite often at her husband's plantation near the banks of Grand Bayou. Iaffite delivered slaves for the plantation at a dock behind the mansion.

According to Koeing, Johnson was co-owner of Magnolia with George Brandy. The plantation was 68 arpents wide and 40 arpents deep in 1812. Currently being torn down, the house is located about an hour's drive from New Orleans on Belle Chasse Highway, near Buras.

One of Magnolia's more prominent claims to fame

was the Magnolia Band, composed of black workers at the plantation. The band toured areas near the plantation and played jazz and ragtime favorites in New Orleans in the early 1900s before World War I.

BIENVENU RETIRES FROM NPS

Lionel Bienvenu has retired from the National Park Service following 24 years of service. He was Chief Historian for the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park.

At the June 10 meeting of the Delta Region Preservation Commission, Bienvenu was presented a plaque in appreciation of his work.

COMMISSION ANNOUNCES WORLD'S FAIR PLANS

The Delta Region Preservation Commission has drawn up a draft resolution for the presentation of traditional Louisiana culture and folklife at the 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans.

Plans call for the establishment of a major folklife component at the 1984 World's Fair by the means listed below:

A folklife coordinator, with professional experience in the field, as well as administrative experience, should be added to the 1984 World's Fair organization. The coordinator should work with the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, the Louisiana Folklife Program, and others developing a framework for presenting regional folk cultural practitioners and activities at an appropriate site or sites within the World's Fair umbrella of activities.

The coordinator should seek funding for on-going exhibits and performance at the fair to present appropriate people and cultural material, as well as to develop the means to conduct field research to locate such people and materials.

The coordinator will have the added function of coordinating the execution of the folk cultural program with the activities of the overall exposition and to exchange information with exposition promotional planning and program development.

OLD NEWS

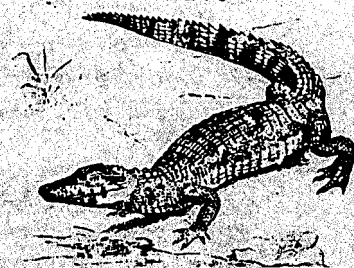
Feb. 28, 1815

Paid ad in the French language newspaper L'Ami des Lois ("The Friend of the Laws")

NOTICE

The bankruptcy of the undersigned, published last year in two of our city's papers, was only undertaken to protect myself from exorbitant pretentious demands - but never to avoid just debts due honest creditors. I hereby make this public announcement, feeling that I have met in full all my obligations. But there may remain still some who believe they have just claims against me. I request them to present their accounts to me without delay, or in my absence, to my brother Jean Iaffite.

Pierre Iaffite



Laffite & the Press

By Sir Jack D.L. Holmes

An unflattering comment on the activities of Jean Laffite appeared in the New Orleans press. The Louisiana Courier for Friday, November 29, 1822 (p. 3, col. 1), informed its readers:

"We have been informed that the famous LAFITTE (sic) of piratical memory, after having been wrecked on the island of Cuba, being destitute of all means of living and of escape, had been discovered and apprehended by some inhabitants who had brought him to PORTO-PRINCIPE, when he had been thrown into a dungeon. Unfortunately for mankind, Laffite was

recognized by several influential persons of the place to whom he had formerly rendered some service and who facilitated his escape. We cannot avoid applauding the feeling of gratitude who (sic for which) moved those persons to break the chains of their benefactor, but at the same time, we cannot too deeply regret, that the monster who has shed so much innocent blood, should have, perhaps, for the hundreth time, escaped the sword of justice, which has been so long hanging on his guilty head."

Reviews

"After the Fact - The Art of Historical Detection," by James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1982 \$19.50) sheds a new light on historical research, focusing on the study of individual's motives and attitudes and the environmental influences which helped shape events in history.

The authors point out how even a first-hand account may be severely mis-leading by recounting Captain John Smith's description of the Indians near Jamestown. As Smith was no scholar, he could only describe the Indians in relation to what he saw them as, rather than what they may have really been. For example, an Indian he described as "priest-like" may have simply been wearing ornamentation which suggested a priest to Smith.

Environmental and cultural influences are

well worth studying according to the authors, for public attitude often determines how an event will unfold.

Although the closest the book gets to Southern history is a description of slave accounts and a re-telling of the Huey Long legend, the book is well worth reading for its interesting perspective on historical research.

-----Pam Keyes, Ed.



NAUTICAL ANTIQUES FEATURED IN CATALOG

A fascinating array of nautical antiques is offered in a catalog published by John F. Rinaldi, Box 765, Dock Square, Kennebunkport, Maine 04046.

Selections range from a single draw brass spyglass and disbursement journal circa 1850-60 for \$410 to a wood figurehead arm holding a rose for \$750. Also shown are fine scrimshaw pieces, sextants and ropework from the 1700s to 1900s.

Whether you are seriously interested in purchasing nautical antiques or just enjoy reading about them, Rinaldi's 18-page catalog is a worthwhile buy at \$2 per year.

DEADLINE FOR THE
WINTER NEWSLETTER
IS OCTOBER 31