



The Laffite Society Chronicles

VOLUME VIII NUMBER 1
FEBRUARY, 2002

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE

Don C. Marler

The Laffite Society had an exciting year in 2001 with trips by members including one to New Orleans and another to the Yucatan. Society members Robert C. Vogel, Dale Olson and Betje Klier made presentations to groups other than the society. Members Jean Epperson and Gary Fritz closed in on the facts of the circumstances surrounding the death of Jean Laffite. We hope to have a comprehensive report on this research for the next issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*.

Society members have been very productive in writing articles for the *Chronicles*. Until now we have had a surplus. With publication of this issue we no longer have a surplus of articles. So now is the time to get the computer fired up and the research engine started. In preparing your article it would be helpful if you could observe the following if possible.

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Just type the footnotes as plain text and we will manipulate them as needed. We have tried to cut and paste the footnotes/endnotes as needed, but strangely, with some programs one cannot cut or eliminate them. Some strange things happen when one tries to change format an article that is typed using one the automatic formats. Please do not let any of the above stop you from submitting an article; if for any reason the above presents a problem, just send it in any form comfortable to you.

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REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE:

THE ADVENTURES OF LOUIS AURY

By Robert C. Vogel¹

Buccaneering on a large scale, as practiced by such renowned freebooters as Hawkins, Morgan, and Lorencillo, had come to an end in the Western Hemisphere before the middle of the eighteenth century, but during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815) and the Wars of Latin American Independence (1811-1825) the maritime commerce of the West Indies was once again harassed by corsairs. This new generation of maritime brigands was predominantly French, Italian and Anglo American in ethnic character, and like their notorious forebears they operated under the pretext of privateering – that is, they were privately owned and armed vessels whose captains carried letters of marque issued by nations at war, and were thus empowered to attack, capture or destroy vessels flying the enemy flag. To escape being branded a pirate, under international law a privateer needed to bring his prizes into a port of the nation to which he claimed allegiance and have the seizure formally approved by a court of admiralty. Until they were captured by British forces, the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe were the principal bases for French national privateers; Baltimore and Charleston in the United States, Baracoa in eastern Cuba, and the Haitian ports of Cap Francois (Cap Haitian) and Aux Cayes also traditionally provided safe haven for privateers. After the fall of the island of Guadeloupe to British forces in 1810, many of the French corsairs shifted their operations to the Gulf of Mexico, where they eventually established for themselves a new colony of adventurers, in some ways reminiscent of old Tortuga, in the Baratarian wilderness south of New Orleans.²

As a result, during the second decade of the nineteenth century the Gulf of Mexico fairly swarmed with privateers, many of whom sought to operate within the letter of the law by securing commissions from the various Latin American provinces which had revolted against the Spanish king. For several years, the favorite source of letters of marque was Cartagena de Indias on the Caribbean coast of South America, which declared its independence

in 1811 and was thereafter a magnet for all kinds of adventurers. The Mexican Congress got into the act in 1814, followed by the republics of Gran Colombia and the United Provinces of South America (Buenos Aires) in 1816. Within the United States itself there was considerable sympathy for the South American revolutionary movements and no shortage of merchants and public men willing to surreptitiously arm and equip commerce raiders, notwithstanding the various Neutrality Acts enacted by Congress.³ While these “patriot” privateers were supposed to capture and destroy only Spanish-flagged shipping, in practice some corsair captains were not discriminating and preyed upon the shipping of neutral nations when the opportunity presented itself.

Between 1810 and 1820, New Orleans was the principal entrepot where Gulf privateers could safely dispose of their prizes and smuggle their cargoes into the United States without clearing customs. The filibustering impulse was also strongest in Louisiana, where United States citizens and adherents of various Latin American revolutionary movements organized and outfitted ambitious schemes to invade and liberate Texas and other Spanish provinces. A cartel of privateers, contrabandists, and filibusters coalesced around the brothers Pierre and Jean Laffite, who by 1813 had emerged as the titular leaders of the Baratarian underworld. But after the United States army and navy broke up the Barataria Bay rendezvous in September 1814, the privateer captains and their *armateurs* had to seek out a new base of operations, where a suitable shore establishment could be erected to handle the condemnation of prizes and the disposal of the booty. Such a base needed to be at the same time remote and convenient (that is, an isolated place within easy traveling distance of New Orleans), but it also had to be inaccessible to deep draft vessels as a safety precaution against interference from American and Spanish naval forces.⁴

While casting about for a new home port for the privateers, the New Orleans cartel and their Baratarian associates

became involved in a complex web of plots aimed at seizing some part of New Spain that could be occupied under the auspices of the Mexican revolutionary government. Plans for sea-borne attacks against Pensacola in West Florida and the Mexican port of Tampico came to naught for lack of naval assets, and after the debacle at Medina River (18 August 1813) there was little real prospect of resurrecting the Republican Army of the North for another land invasion of Texas.⁵ Nevertheless, late in 1814 a potentially lucrative traffic in munitions was opened between New Orleans and the Mexican rebel port of Nautla, near Vera Cruz.⁶ Shortly after the Battle of New Orleans, Henry Perry, a veteran of the Gutierrez-Magee filibustering expedition of 1812-1813 who had also served with Andrew Jackson's army, organized yet another military expedition against Texas. In September 1815, Colonel Perry's advance party landed on the wind-swept peninsula bordering Galveston Bay, at a point of land he named Bolivar, in honor of the Venezuelan patriot leader.⁷

Opposite Bolivar Point lay Galveston Island (also known as Isle St. Louis and Isla Culebra), a low, sandy barrier island across the mouth of Galveston Bay. The channel between the eastern tip of Galveston Island and Bolivar Point was a little more than three miles wide but had treacherous shoals. Fortunately, there was good ground offshore for brigs and schooners to anchor within a few cable lengths of the beach on the Gulf side of Galveston Island, and inside Galveston Bay the myriad of coastal bayous, lakes, and rivers were easily navigable by pirogue and bateaux. It was here, in the summer of 1816, that the privateers of the Gulf set up their new headquarters and developed a smuggling establishment which supplied Louisiana merchants with contraband slaves and other goods at low prices. By the spring of 1817 Galveston had become the nucleus for an international colony of adventurers that grew helter-skelter, as different gangs of freebooters came and left.

The first corsair chieftain to lord over Galveston was Louis-Michel Aury, a mysterious and romantic adventurer who claimed the rank of commodore and exercised control over a motley squadron of brigs and schooners. When he landed on Galveston Island in the fall of 1816, this terror of the Gulf was about 29 years of age and had been a privateersman since 1803. As a young man, he had served briefly in the French navy: some accounts have it that

before he deserted the navy he was an ordinary seaman or a sailmaker's mate, while others maintain that he was a midshipman or uncommissioned volunteer who had joined the naval service as an adolescent. All of the available evidence points to his nativity in Paris and to the death of his father when he was very young; that he had a sister named Victoire; that Aury and his sister were raised by their mother in the households of the family Maignet and an uncle named Aury; that young Louis-Michel had some formal education and at least a modicum of naval officer training. Nothing much is known of his career afloat prior to the year 1810, but the activities of the remainder of his life are fairly well documented in official records and in Aury's own writings. In addition to his native French, he appears to have been fluent in English and Spanish and had a knack for self-aggrandizing prose in all three languages. More importantly, he possessed to a remarkable degree the ability to lead criminals and adventure-seekers of both high and low station. He was described by contemporaries as handsome, articulate, proud, and brave; and while his foes characterized him as a pirate and great villain, his compatriots regarded him as a privateer who operated strictly within the law of nations, a gentleman and a staunch patriot.⁸

After an up-and-down career as a corsair operating out of various West Indian islands, including stops in New Orleans, Baltimore, and Charleston, Aury entered the service of the revolutionary council of Cartagena on 9 June 1813.⁹ As an officer in Cartagena's privately armed naval force, he rose quickly to the command of a squadron of schooners and may have participated in Chassereux's raid on Portobello on the Isthmus of Panama on 16 January 1814. Judging from his own letters and a memorial of service compiled in 1820,¹⁰ he seems to have generally prospered during his time in South America. The dashing Aury especially made many friends and became a prominent figure among the revolutionary elite. When the royalist army and naval forces under Pablo Morillo laid siege to Cartagena late in July 1815, Aury distinguished himself in several sharp actions, but after a harrowing five-month siege Cartagena's defenses collapsed, and on 5-6 December 1815 Aury's schooners led a flotilla of thirteen vessels carrying refugees and the rebel government in exile through the Spanish blockade to Aux Cayes on the southwest coast of Haiti.¹¹

In Aux Cayes, Aury's dissatisfaction with the revolutionary leadership became acute and he quarreled openly with Simon Bolivar and Luis Brion, who were organizing an expedition to invade Venezuela under the revolutionary banner. Aury was opposed to the leadership of Bolivar, and Brion (who owned most of the ships in Cartagena's infant navy) refused to volunteer any of his assets unless Bolivar was in overall command. Things turned nasty when Aury demanded payment for services rendered in the defense of Cartagena and refused to turn his schooners over to Brion. His mind was made up when he learned that the Baratarians and their friends from the Mexican revolutionary junta in New Orleans were actively plotting an expedition to seize a Spanish port in the Gulf of Mexico. To Aury, the road to greater fame and prosperity now seemed to lead through the Gulf of Mexico, so he defected before Bolivar's expeditionary force set sail from Aux Cayes in March 1816 – but not before Haitian president-for-life Alexandre Pétion, a staunch supporter of Bolivar, persuaded him to return the armed brig *Constitucion*.¹² Quitting Haiti, Aury took his renegade squadron through the Yucatan Channel into the Gulf of Mexico, where he began making prizes of Spanish shipping. In July he appeared off the mouth of the Mississippi and greatly alarmed the local naval and customs authorities in Louisiana with several brazen violations of the neutrality and revenue laws.¹³ During the month of August, he met with the most important leaders of the New Orleans cartel, including Jose Manuel de Herrera, the Mexican Congress' newly appointed minister plenipotentiary to the United States, who had sailed north from Nautla the previous summer with bundles of blank Mexican letters of marque.¹⁴ He also conferred with the Baratarian boss Pierre Laffite, who was still recovering from the financial setbacks received at the end of the War of 1812 – but he did not have opportunity to meet with the Baratarian's younger brother Jean Laffite, who was then accompanying Major Arsene L. Latour on a clandestine reconnaissance of the Arkansas country (all three had become Spanish secret agents late in 1815 and were actively plotting against the privateers and filibusters).¹⁵ In due course Aury was able to strike a deal with the New Orleans cartel, who enthusiastically supported his leadership of the Galveston project. Sometime between June and August, Aury's

forces had been bolstered by additional ships and a contingent of soldiers, mostly blacks and mulattos recruited in San Domingo and led by Colonel Joseph Savary, a veteran of the Battle of New Orleans. Conspicuous among Aury's followers were several former soldiers who had served in Napoleon's armies in Europe.¹⁶

Once he arrived in Texas, Aury found a chaotic situation on Galveston Island, which had already become the assembly point for criminals and adventurers, including some very hard and desperate characters. Living conditions were primitive both ashore and afloat, and there were perhaps three or four hundred men on the island at that time, as well as an unknown number of women.¹⁷ More to the point, not all of them were disposed to accept Aury's leadership. A faction within the Santo Domingo contingent appears to have been most dissatisfied and on the night of 7-8 September they staged a mutiny.

Whatever Louis Aury may or may not have been, he was beyond question personally brave and a cool customer under fire. One gang of mutineers stormed Aury's headquarters and attacked the commodore in his tent, wounding him before they were driven off. In a letter to his sister he wrote: "I received three bullets, one in the right hand which deprives me of the use of the forefinger, one which struck my left breast and passed between flesh and skin, and the other in the left hand." Though weak from loss of blood, Aury mustered his loyal followers and by dawn was able to regain control over the camp. The mutineers boarded three small schooners and were allowed to sail away to New Orleans, taking with them much of the accumulated booty.¹⁸

Four days later, on 12 September, a brief ceremony was held on the eastern end of Galveston Island, where Minister Herrera officially bestowed upon Commodore Aury the title of military and civil governor of that place, which was designated a *Puerto Habilitado* of the Mexican republic. A salute was fired and the flag of independent Mexico was raised. In short order a local government was organized, with a customhouse (managed by Aury's associate Pierre Rousselin) and an admiralty court (headed up by Messrs. Ducoin and Espagnol) authorized to condemn lawful prizes.¹⁹ By then several of Aury's vessels, their captains equipped with both Cartagena and Mexican commissions, had fanned out across the Gulf in search of prizes. While we do not know the actual

composition of Aury's Texas squadron, contemporary sources indicate fourteen or sixteen vessels, including prizes and auxiliaries. The most noteworthy of these were the brigs *Mexican Congress*, of 14 or 16 guns, which later served as Aury's flagship, and *Mars*, also of 14 guns; and the schooners *Jupiter*, *Gran Sultan*, *Bellona*, *La Guerriere*, and *America Libre*, which carried between six and eight guns apiece.²⁰

Over the next three months, Aury worked tirelessly to unite the various factions within the colony of adventurers and to put his own privateering enterprise upon a sound business footing. Unlike the Laffite brothers and the other Baratarians corsairs, who operated more or less independently, Aury was the *de facto* leader of a flotilla of privateers whose captains cruised when and where the commodore directed. The details are lacking in the archival record, but the prize money was probably distributed in the normal manner, with a substantial part of the loot deposited with the Bank of Louisiana in New Orleans.²¹ Aury enlarged his fortified camp on the eastern end of the island, where a rude village of thatched huts and tents clustered along the low, sandy ridge, roughly where the University of Texas Medical Branch now stands. Aury himself appears to have eschewed any kind of commandant's house: visitors to Galveston found him set up in an old hulk, which would have been the familiar naval expedient. Throughout the latter part of 1816 and early 1817, more and more privateers resorted to Galveston to dispose of their prizes or to escape from pursuing men-o'-war. Within a year after escaping from Cartagena, Aury had a practical monopoly of privateering in the Gulf of Mexico.²²

Unheralded, but accompanied by rumors that he intended to lead a two- to four-thousand man army in an assault on Tampico or Pensacola, General Francisco Xavier Mina arrived at Galveston Island on 24 November 1816, after a horrific, fever-wrought 30-day voyage from Port-au-Prince. The dashing 27-year-old native of Navarre had gained notoriety as a *guerillero* fighting against the French in Spain and in 1815 he had gone to the United States to organize the liberation of Mexico. Encouraged by liberals and speculators, Mina assembled a small cadre of professionally-trained soldiers and hired vessels to transport them to Haiti, thence to Galveston. After some bickering, Aury agreed to become Mina's partner.²³

Although Aury's Galveston enterprise was now at its zenith, the success of the Texas project had already begun to wane shortly after Mina appeared on the scene. In its natural condition, Galveston Island was an inhospitable sand bar, subject to overflows caused by Gulf storms, nearly treeless, and without much fresh water. The colony had to be provisioned almost entirely by sea, and while smuggling slaves and other merchandise into Louisiana was immensely profitable, the nearest market was New Orleans, a six-day journey by schooner and barge, two weeks by skiff or pirogue, a month overland along the ancient pathway across the coastal plain. The United States had also stepped up its efforts to interdict smugglers, harry filibusters, and suppress piracy – the rise in maritime brigandage was becoming a serious threat to legitimate commerce and American mercantile interests were calling for more warships and revenue cutters to be sent to the Gulf station. Finally, as an irregular naval base, Galveston had serious drawbacks. Even with fair weather and a skilled pilot, navigating the waters of the Bolivar Roads and Galveston Bay was not for the faint of heart. In dirty weather, Galveston became a graveyard for vessels large and small, and Aury saw several of his valuable assets sunk or grounded.²⁴

After a final conference with his American backers in February or March, General Mina became convinced that the schemes of the New Orleans cartel were motivated more by commerce than liberal ideology. He then resolved to begin the liberation of Mexico with an amphibious landing on the Gulf Coast at Soto la Marina, in the province of Nuevo Santander (modern-day Tamaulipas). Returning to Galveston in mid-March, Mina had a long conversation with Commodore Aury, who obviously did not share the general's enthusiasm for the invasion plan but nevertheless agreed to convoy Mina's expeditionary force to Soto la Marina. Aury probably viewed the expedition as a quick and painless way to rid himself of the troublesome revolutionary and his Anglo-American allies – he may have also seen it as a way to eliminate a competitor, and thereby wrangle additional resources from the New Orleans cartel for his own purposes. In due course, Mina, his American honor guard, and about three hundred soldiers (including Colonel Perry's semi-independent contingent) were embarked on eight privately hired transports, which set off from Galveston in

early April, escorted by several of Aury's cruisers.²⁵ Mina and his little army landed at Soto la Marina on 15 April and were scarcely ashore before Aury's privateers set sail and started to beat back up the coast to Galveston, pausing en route to inspect the anchorage in Matagorda Bay. Left to his own devices, Mina met with some early success but his expedition ended in complete disaster. Cut off from reinforcements, he was defeated and captured at Venadito on 27 October and was executed by firing squad on 11 November.²⁶

Unfortunately for Commodore Aury, fate chose this moment in history to play an ironic trick. A few days before Mina's expedition departed for Soto la Marina, a vessel from New Orleans had appeared off Galveston bearing none other than Jean Laffite, who had been dispatched by the captain-general of Cuba to spy on the Galveston colony under cover of a commercial visit. As he recorded in his diary, Laffite had interviews with both Aury and Mina, whence he learned some of the details of their impending expedition against Soto la Marina. Hurrying back to New Orleans, Laffite met with his brother and other confidential advisors, who then proposed to the Spanish consul that the Baratarians take control of Galveston during Aury and Mina's absence, install a new regime to operate the place as a rendezvous for privateers (controlled by the brothers Laffite, of course), and use it as a front for their clandestine efforts to confuse His Catholic Majesty's enemies. The Spanish vice consul in New Orleans urged acceptance of the Laffite plan and the Baratarians rushed to organize an expedition for the relief of Galveston. Acting as front-man for his brother, Jean Laffite quickly effected a bloodless coup d'état at Galveston, which was practically deserted when poor minister Herrera swore in the new government on board Bathelomy Lafon's schooner *Carmelita* on 15 April. When Aury returned from Soto la Marina in early May, he found the Baratarians firmly entrenched on Galveston.²⁷

Seeing the writing on the wall, Aury had already attempted to establish a new base of operations at Matagorda Bay (Herrera had specifically given him discretionary power to move the seat of government from Galveston).²⁸ However, deficiencies in the harbor, the loss of several of his ships in a tropical storm, and Indian troubles (the Karankawa massacred his shipwrecked crews) compelled him to

quit the Texas coast.²⁹ He announced his decision to leave the Gulf in a letter to Minister Herrera, in which he disavowed any connection with the goings-on at Galveston after 31 July 1817. He also duly informed the Collector of the Port of New Orleans of his intentions.³⁰

Aury had decided to go to Amelia Island, at the mouth of the St. Mary's River on the Atlantic Coast of Florida, to hook up with the swashbuckling General Gregor MacGregor, who had launched an invasion of Spanish East Florida through the border outpost at Fernandina at the end of June. MacGregor was a Scots soldier-of-fortune who had fought alongside Bolivar in Venezuela and was personally known to Aury, who also liked to portray himself as a Latin American patriot by adoption.³¹ However, when Aury arrived off Amelia Island on 17 September, he was disappointed to learn that General MacGregor had abandoned the venture a few days earlier, having exhausted his funding and the patience of his rag-tag army. Without missing a beat, Aury hoisted the colors of the Mexican Congress and proclaimed himself to be the commander-in-chief of the forces on Amelia Island, a dependency of the Mexican republic. (He seems to have conveniently forgotten having formally tendered his resignation from the Mexican service two months earlier.) With the assistance of the propagandist Vicente Pazos Silva, a former newspaper editor from Buenos Aires, and Dr. Pedro Gaul, Venezuela's revolutionary agent in the United States, he formed a new council of government which immediately elected him supreme military and civil commander. "We have come here to plant the tree of liberty," he announced in one of his proclamations, and then declared martial law. It is not clear how Aury expected to persist with a privateer base so close to American territory, though he may have reckoned on eventually becoming a stakeholder in a scheme to annex East Florida to the United States. It is doubtful, however, that he ever intended to use Amelia Island as anything more than a temporary base and as window dressing to deflect charges of piracy.³²

The beginning of the end of Aury's Amelia Island adventure came in November 1817, when the Monroe Administration decided to evict the Florida revolutionaries, whose presence threatened to disrupt diplomacy that would eventually result in the Adams-Onís Treaty. On 22 December a United States warship carrying a contingent of soldiers from the Charleston garrison

dropped anchor off Aury's headquarters and demanded the surrender of the place. Aury made an equivocal reply, indicating that he was the legitimate head of the new revolutionary government that had wrested Florida from Spain; he was, however, willing to negotiate a mutually beneficial settlement, then step aside and allow the United States to occupy Fernandina. The Americans replied with an ultimatum: haul down the Mexican flag, embark all foreign soldiers, and sail away forthwith – or, suffer the consequences. Realizing that his position was untenable, Aury threw dignity to the winds and complied, handing over the fort to representatives of the United States Navy and Army on 23 December. Most of Aury's forces departed from Amelia Island during the next few weeks, with Aury himself lingering about until the end of January 1818.³³

After leaving Florida, Aury touched briefly at Charleston, South Carolina, once a favorite haunt of French privateers and a place where he was a familiar figure. Too familiar, as it turned out. On 16 March, he was arrested on the basis of a complaint filed by the Spanish consul there, representing the owners of a Spanish merchant vessel seized by Aury in May 1814 – one of the shipowners had recognized Aury walking down the street in Charleston. When called to appear in federal district court, Aury's attorney pleaded that his client was a foreign national and that the alleged crime had occurred outside the jurisdiction of the United States. On 18 March Judge William Drayton dismissed Hernandez vs. Aury and the commodore hastened back to sea, never to set foot again in the United States.³⁴

Searching for a suitable location on which to build a permanent establishment outside the reach of any of the major powers, Aury headed back to the Caribbean, armed with a fresh privateer's commission from the American agent of the Provincias Federales de Buenos Aires y Chili.³⁵ On 4 July 1818 he easily captured Isla de Providencia y Santa Catalina, part of an archipelago of raised coral and limestone islands approximately 385 miles northeast of Cartagena and 110 miles off the Central American mainland. Here he founded a new international colony of adventure under the flags of Mexico, Venezuela, New Granada, and Buenos Aires. Taking over the settlement of Isabella, Aury reconstructed the old fort and attracted to his banner several hundred more of the sort of men he had commanded at Galveston and Amelia Island.³⁶ There he

prospered for the next year or so, all the while intriguing with the representatives of various South American revolutionary movements in a desperate effort to obtain the support and protection he needed to continue his operations. He also joined forces once again with his old friend General MacGregor, who had returned to the Caribbean to launch another series of disastrous forays against the Spanish Main.³⁷

Aury enjoyed somewhat better luck than his old comrade in arms. On 13 May 1819 he appeared off the coast of Guatemala, dispatched an assault force up the Rio Dulce, and captured the Castillo de San Felipe on Lake Izabal. Cruising off Central America, Aury's privateers also made several valuable prizes, worth \$700,000 according to one newspaper report.³⁸ After coping with a hurricane, famine, and an outbreak of fever on Old Providence, during April-May 1821 he attacked the fortified towns of Trujillo and the Castillo de San Fernando at Omoa in the Gulf of Honduras, but was driven off by the defenders.³⁹ The raids against the Spanish Main and occasional seizures of Spanish merchant ships netted him handsome profits, but Aury's more ambitious projects to liberate Central America failed to produce measurable results and his grandiose privateering schemes began gradually to degenerate into piracy. By 1821 the romantic figure who had once been a terror to the Spaniards was in reality little more than a petty buccaneer, the self-proclaimed liberator of an obscure island off the Mosquito Coast, and a minor actor in what one newspaper called "the fag-end of what was recently called privateering."⁴⁰ The last straw came on 18 January 1821, when he was summarily dismissed from the service of the republic of Gran Colombia by order of his old nemesis, Simon Bolivar, now firmly established as *El Libertador*. Aury received no response from Jose de San Martin to his proposal to liberate Panama and several of the new republics disavowed privateering altogether. Deeply embittered, he retired to his home on Old Providence, where he composed a lengthy petition to the congress in Bogota, detailing the many injustices done to him by Brion and others.⁴¹ There, on 30 August 1821, he died from injuries received in a fall from horseback. He was thirty-three years old.⁴² After Aury's death, his loyal lieutenant, Jean Baptiste Faiquere, remained in command of the privateer remnants at Old Providence and was installed as governor of that place when the archipelago was formally

attached to the republic of Gran Colombia in 1822.⁴³ By that time most of the privateersmen had drifted away, but a rather surprising number of Aury's associates and followers later found their way into the history books.

In 1820 the King of the Mosquitos awarded Gregor MacGregor (who never stopped meditating on grand schemes) a 7,000-square mile land grant along the Rio Tinto, in present-day Olancho department, Honduras. Here the general (now *cacique*, self-styled as the "prince of Poyais") attempted to plant an English-speaking agricultural colony. Subsequently imprisoned in both France and England for fraud, MacGregor and the lovely Donna Josepha returned to Venezuela penniless in 1839 to be pensioned by a grateful Colombian government.⁴⁴ Louis Peru de Lacroix, Aury's principal military commander and formerly an officer in the French army, went on to distinguish himself as a general in the Colombian army under Bolivar and penned a famous diary of his experiences as a member of El Libertador's inner circle at Bucaramango. Sebastian Boquier, an Italian adventurer who had joined Aury in 1815 as the captain of the schooner *Gran Sultan*, in 1820 took a commission in the Venezuelan navy and won honors for his service at the Battle of Lake Maracaibo (24 July 1823).⁴⁵

The Italian soldiers of fortune Constante Ferrari and Agustin Codazzi, who had fought in Napoleon's Grande Armee at Waterloo and freelanced for the Sultan in Constantinople before following Aury to Galveston, Amelia Island, and Old Providence, both retired briefly to Europe in the early 1820's, then returned to Latin America. Codazzi earned distinction in Colombia and Venezuela as a geographer and cartographer, and authored an important memoir of his career as a privateersman that was published in 1970. Ferrari continued to find employment as a soldier of fortune in both South America and Europe, befriended Lord Byron in Greece, and also wrote a memoir that was not published until long after his death.⁴⁶

An otherwise obscure Aury follower, one George Donald Schumph, an Anglo Canadian adventurer who had been at both Galveston and Old Providence, earned a footnote in the history of the brothers Laffite. After Aury's death, Schumph drifted to Belize and eventually found his way to the northern coast of the Yucatan peninsula, where at the end of October 1821 he and the old Baratarian corsair Pierre Laffite were caught in the

middle of a shoot-out between local militiamen and a gang of Italian pirates. Both Schumph and Laffite were taken into custody by the Spanish commander, but Laffite was mortally wounded in the gunfight and was buried in the *campo santo* of the Church of Santa Clara de Dzidzantun. Schumph was escorted to Merida (accompanied part of the way by Laffite's Anglo-French companion, Lucy Allen), where he was interrogated briefly by the authorities, and then vanished into the fog of history.⁴⁷

Although in his own day Aury's name was a household word because of his quasi-piratical activities, his Texas adventures are recalled in popular histories written for North Americans chiefly as a prelude to Jean Laffite's occupation of Galveston Island, while his Amelia Island enterprise customarily receives scant attention in all but the most specialized of histories.⁴⁸ Most scholarly works in English treat him as an independent freebooter who flashed across the horizon of notoriety, then vanished into obscurity.⁴⁹ Among Latin American historians his activities are somewhat better known, or at least better appreciated,⁵⁰ and he is the subject of an excellent book-length biography published in 1976 by the Argentine diplomat and scholar Carlos A. Ferro.

References

¹ This essay is a slightly expanded version of a paper, "The Adventures of Louis Aury on the Texas Coast, 1816-1817," read at a symposium on the French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture, at the University of Texas, Austin, on 9 March 2001.

² The historic context of piracy and privateering in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico is described in Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge, 1987); Violet Barbour, "Privateers and Pirates of the West Indies," *American Historical Review*, 16 (1911):529-566; Rene Guillemin, *Corsaires de la Republique et de l'Empire* (Paris, 1982); Agustin Beraza, *Los Corsarios de Artigas* (Montevideo, 1949); Louis Winkler Bealer, *Los Corsarios de Buenos Aires: Sus actividades en las guerras Hispano-Americanas de la Independencia* (Buenos Aires, 1937); Stanley Faye, "Privateers of the Gulf and Their Prizes," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 22 (1939):1012-1094, and "Privateers of Guadeloupe and Their Establishment in Barataria," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 23 (1940):428-444; and Maury D. Baker, Jr., "The United States and Piracy During the Spanish-American Wars of Independence," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1947.

³ For background on the Latin American wars of independence, see Charles Carroll Griffin, *The United States and the Disruption of the Spanish*

Empire 1810-1822: A Study of the Relations of the United States with Spain and With the Rebel Spanish Colonies (New York, 1937); Alfred Toledano Wellborn, "Relations Between New Orleans and Latin America, 1810-1824," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 22 (1939):710-794; and A. Curtis Wilgus, "Spanish American Patriot Activity Along the Gulf Coast of the United States, 1811-1822," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 8 (1925):193-215.

⁴ Robert C. Vogel, "Jean Laffite, the Baratarians and the Historical Geography of Piracy in the Gulf of Mexico," *Gulf Coast Historical Review* 5 (1990):62-77, presents an overview of the Laffite brothers' activities in Louisiana and Texas.

⁵ See Harold A. Bierck, Jr., "Pedro Gaul and the Patriot Effort to Capture a Mexican Port, 1816," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 27 (1947):456-466. The travails of the Republican Army of the North are discussed in Julia Kathryn Garrett, *Green Flag Over Texas: The Story of the Last Years of Spain in Texas* (New York, 1939); and Harris Gaylord Warren, *The Sword Was Their Passport: A History of American Filibustering in the Mexican Revolution* (Baton Rouge, 1943).

⁶ The Baratarian-Mexican Congress connection is discussed in Lucas Alaman, *Historia de Mejico*, 5 vols. (Mexico, 1942), 4:102-106. Nautla later fell to the royalists and was replaced by Boquilla de Piedras (*ibid.*, 4:199-200).

⁷ Henderson K. Yoakum, *History of Texas from Its First Settlement in 1685 to Its Annexation to the United States in 1846*, 2 vols. (New York, 1855), 1:180-186; Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*, 39 vols. (San Francisco, 1882-1890), Volume XII: *History of Mexico*, pp. 605-607. On the Internet, see the article on Henry Perry posted on the Handbook of Texas Online website (<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/PP/fpe42.html>).

⁸ The biographical information on Aury presented in this essay is based to a large extent upon two well-known secondary sources: Stanley Faye, "Commodore Aury," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 24 (1941):612-697; and Carlos A. Ferro, *Vida de Luis Aury, Corsario de Buenos Aires en las luchas por la Independencia de Venezuela, Colombia y Centroamerica* (Buenos Aires, 1976). The latter is by far the most comprehensive treatment, based on exacting research in Latin American archival sources, but devotes a disappointingly short chapter to Aury's adventures in Texas. A collection of Aury's personal papers is preserved in the Aury Papers at the Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, a collection of twenty-three items dating from 1808-1821 that includes an undated (and unauthenticated) pencil sketch purported to be of Aury himself. Excerpts from several of the Aury letters were published in English translation by Lancaster E. Dabney in his article, "Louis Aury: The First Governor of Texas Under the Mexican Republic," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 41 (1938):108-116.

⁹ Court documents and notarial records provide fleeting glimpses into Aury's activities in the United States prior to 1815. See, e.g., U.S. District Court cases 374, 376, 377 relating to Aury and the his problems in New Orleans in 1810 as captain of the

French national privateer *Guillaume*; Records of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana, Record Group 21, National Archives and Records Center-Southwest Region, Fort Worth, Tex. None of Aury's biographers have made much use of these kinds of archival materials, the careful study of which might shed important new light on aspects of Aury's career.

¹⁰ What appears to be a rough draft of this remarkable document, which has never been published in English, is in the Aury Papers at the Center for American History.

¹¹ For background on the siege of Cartagena, see Jesus Maria Henia and Gerardo Arrubla, *History of Colombia*, J. Fred Rippy trans. and ed. (Port Washington NY, 1972), pp. 268-274; and Jane Lucas DeGrummond, *Renato Beluche: Smuggler, Privateer, and Patriot, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1983), pp. 134-139.

¹² The backdrop for this episode is the so-called Assembly of Aux Cayes. General Simon Bolivar (1783-1830) resigned command of the rebel armies on 8 May 1815 and went into exile on the island of Jamaica. Upon hearing of the fall of Cartagena, he went to Aux Cayes (Los Cayos) in southern Haiti at the end of December 1815 and participated in a conference that lasted until early March 1816, when he was proclaimed supreme political and military commander. On 31 March, Bolivar sailed from Aux Cayes bound for Margarita Island with 240 soldiers, escorted by a squadron of Brion's privateers (including Renato Beluche in his schooner *La Popa*), but the Aux Cayes expedition was a failure and he returned to Aux Cayes in July. Bolivar successfully re-invaded Venezuela at the end of 1816 and captured the town of Angostura (now Ciudad Bolivar), where he was proclaimed dictator. Subsequently, in 1819 he marched into New Granada (Colombia), defeated the Spanish armies there, and in turn crushed the royalist army in Venezuela by June 1821. We know that Aury was in Port-au-Prince in March 1816: preserved in the Aury Papers is a letter from him to his sister Victoire dated there on the fifteenth of the month.

¹³ *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore), 31 August 1816; *L'Ami des Lois* (New Orleans), 30 July and 5 August 1816.

¹⁴ Harris Gaylord Warren, ed., "Documents Relating to the Establishment of Privateers at Galveston, 1816-1817," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 21 (1938):1056-1109; see also Alaman, *Historia de Mejico*, 4:225, 459-460; and Griffen, *The United States and the Disruption of the Spanish Empire*, pp. 155-156. Many documents relating to Herrera's dealings with the New Orleans cartel have been collected in Mexico City in the Archivo General de la Nacion, Operaciones de Guerra (vol. 1), along with the correspondence of the viceroy and others with authorities in Cuba and Texas concerning Aury.

¹⁵ See Stanley Faye, "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 23 (1940):733-826, which remains the standard work on the Laffite brothers' activities during ca. 1815-1821; cf. Harris Gaylord Warren, ed., "Documents Relating to Pierre Laffite's Entrance into the Service of Spain," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 44

(1940):76-87. For Latour, see Edwin H. Carpenter, Jr., "Arsene Lacarriere Latour," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 18 (1938):221-227, and "Latour's Report on Spanish-American Relations in the Southwest," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 30 (1947):715-738.

¹⁶ William Davis Robinson, *Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution; Including A Narrative of the Expedition of General Xavier Mina*, 2 vols. (London, 1821), p. 107. Aury's followers who had previously served in the Grand Armee included Peru de Lacroix, Agustin Codazzi, and Constante Ferrari (see notes 45 and 46, below).

¹⁷ Unfortunately, the distaff side of the Galveston Island colony of adventurers remains all but invisible. Robinson tells the story of a French woman named "La Mar" who accompanied Mina's expedition to Galveston and Soto la Marina in 1817. This "extraordinary woman" cared for the sick and wounded at Soto la Marina, where she was imprisoned by the Spaniards; but eventually escaped to join the rebels fighting in the interior; *Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution*, pp. 315-316.

¹⁸ In the letter to his sister previously cited, Aury claimed they went back to Santo Domingo, "for they were all men of color."

¹⁹ Alaman discusses Herrera's mission to the United States during 1815-1816 in *Historia de Mejico*, 4:459-460. Much of the raw Spanish intelligence relating to Aury's establishment at Galveston is included in the reports to the captain-general of Cuba and other senior officials written by the Spanish consuls Diego Morphy and Felipe Fatio from New Orleans during 1816-1817, which are in legajo 1900, Papeles de Cuba, Archivo General de Indias, Seville. Some records of the piratical establishment, including items relating to specific vessels and transactions, also found their way into the Archivo General de la Nacion in Mexico City, where they can be found in the Historia series (vols. 96 and 152). Particularly detailed information about Aury's operations at Galveston was obtained by Beverly Chew, Collector of the Port of New Orleans, which he transmitted to the Secretary of the Treasury; of special interest are his letters dated 1 August 1817, 30 August 1817, 17 October 1817; see Correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury with Collectors of Customs 1789-1833 From Record Group 56, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, National Archives Microcopy M176, roll 16; excerpts from these materials were printed in the *American State Papers, Class I, Foreign Relations*, 6 vols. (Washington, 1834), 4:134-138, 143-144. See also Warren, *The Sword Was Their Passport*, pp. 143-144, and Bancroft, *Works, Volume XVI:History of the North Mexican States and Texas*, pp. 34-36.

²⁰ No table of organization of the Gulf corsairs exists, of course, but some idea of the composition of Aury's squadron can be ascertained from reports printed in contemporary newspapers (e.g. *Niles' Weekly Register*, 31 August 1816, 21 September 1816, and 2 August 1817) and from New Orleans customhouse and federal court records. For general information about Aury's captains, with references to their various vessels, see Ferro, *Vida de Luis Aury*, pp. 171-177.

²¹ Baron Luis de Onis, Spain's minister to the United States, complained about the depredations of Aury's privateers in several letters addressed to Secretary of State James Monroe. In a letter of protest dated 10 February 1817, Onis fumed that the Spanish consul at New Orleans had informed him that the "band of robbers" at Galveston had more than \$180,000 on deposit at the Bank of Louisiana in New Orleans; William Ray Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States Concerning the Independence of the Latin American Nations*, 3 vols. (New York, 1925), 3:1916; see also *American State Papers Foreign Relations*, 4:184-186.

American State Papers Foreign Relations, 4:184-186.

²² In his letter of 30 August 1817, Collector Chew described Galveston as "a small island, or rather a small sand-bar" with "no buildings, except a few huts or cabins, probably three or four, made of boards and sails of vessels." According to Robinson, who was an eye-witness, Aury built a "mud fort" to the west of Mina's encampment; *Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution*, p. 105.

²³ Robinson, *Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution*, pp. 103-109; Alaman, *Historia de Mejico*, 4:509-590; Harris Gaylord Warren, "The Origin of General Mina's Invasion of Mexico," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 42 (1938):1-20. See also the article on Francisco Xavier Mina in The Handbook of Texas Online (<http://www.tsha.ued/handbook/online/articles/view/MM/fmi46.html>).

²⁴ Robinson, *Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution*, p. 104; cf. David G. McComb, *Galveston: A History* (Austin, 1986), p. 8. A contemporary map, titled *Bahia de Galvez-town*, appears as plate 34 in the Direccion Hidrografica atlas, *Portulano de la America Setentrional* (Madrid, 1818). Better known are the *Plano de la Bahia y Puerto de Galvestown en el Departamento de Texas*, drawn by Alexander Thompson for the Mexican Navy in 1828, and the *Entrada de la Bahia de Galvestown*, which the present writer has seen only in the form of a photostat at the Rosenberg Library, Galveston, which is said to have been obtained from an original archived in Bogota, Colombia.

²⁵ Harris Gaylord Warren, "Xavier Mina's Invasion of Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 23 (1943):52-76; Bancroft, *History of the North Mexican States and Texas*, pp. 37-38, and *History of Mexico*, pp. 659-685; Alaman, *Historia de Mejico*, 4:509-590, 728-737.

²⁶ Alaman, *Historia de Mejico*, 4:518-524. All of Mina's vessels, except the *Ellen Tooker*, were captured off Soto la Marina by Spanish naval vessels dispatched from Vera Cruz; Robinson, *Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution*, pp. 153-155.

²⁷ Jean Laffite's diary is enclosure number one in Fatio to Cienfuegos, 24 May 1817, legajo 1900, Papeles de Cuba. The Baratarian coup is discussed in Warren, *The Sword Was Their Passport*, pp. 175-177; *American State Papers Foreign Relations* 4:135-138; and Bancroft, *History of the North Mexican States and Texas*, pp. 41-42.

²⁸ Chew to the Secretary of the Treasury, 1 August 1817, in op. cit.

²⁹ Alaman, *Historia de Mejico*, 4:639-640; Bancroft, *History of the North Mexican States and Texas*, p. 38; Yoakum, *History of Texas*, 1:193-194. The governor of Texas and his subordinates carefully monitored Aury's trials and tribulations at Matagorda, as evidenced by the reports translated by Virginia H. Taylor in *Letters of Antonio Martinez: Last Spanish Governor of Texas, 1817-1822* (Austin, 1957), 5, 22, 26-33. A letter from the commandant at La Bahia to Governor Martinez, dated 13 August 1817, reports that scouts had retrieved scrap iron taken off pirate vessels wrecked on Bergantin Island; Bexar Archives, Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin. A century and a half later, stories of old pirate fortifications at St. Joseph Island near Aransas Pass and around the mouth of the Colorado River still reverberated in local folklore; see, e.g., the article in the *Corpus Christi Caller*, 4 June 1940, and Hobart Huson, *Refugio: A Comprehensive History of Refugio County From Aboriginal Times to 1953*, 2 vols. (Woodsboro, Tex., 1953), 1:104; cf. Wayne H. and Martha K. McAlister, *Matagorda Island: A Naturalist's Guide* (Austin, 1993), pp. 57-59.

³⁰ The text of Aury's letter to Herrera, with his enclosed service record, was printed in U.S. Department of State, *Message from the President of the United States Transmitting . . . Information, Not Heretofore Communicated, Relating to the Occupation of Amelia Island*, 15th Cong. 1st sess., House Doc. 175 (Washington, 1817), pp. 36-37. Aury addressed his letter to Herrera in New Orleans from Galveston, but his note to Chew, dated 28 July, with a duplicate dated 31 July, was composed at sea. In his letter to the Secretary of the Treasury of 17 October 1817, Chew reported that Aury was heading for Amelia Island after having smuggled a last cargo of 300 slaves into Louisiana; in the same communication he also noted receipt of Aury's letter of 31 July 1817. According to Bancroft, Aury learned of MacGregor's expedition before he returned to Galveston about the middle of July; *History of the North Mexican States and Texas*, pp. 38-39.

³¹ The standard sources for MacGregor's invasion of Florida are T. Frederick Davis, *MacGregor's Invasion of Florida, 1817: Together with an Account of His Successors, Irwin, Hubbard, and Aury on Amelia Island, East Florida* (Jacksonville, 1928), pp. 5-32; and John Skinner, "Letters Relating to MacGregor's Attempted Conquest of East Florida, 1817," in *Florida Historical Quarterly* 5 (1926):54-57; see also Ferro, *Vida de Luis Aury*, pp. 45-57. Sir Gregor MacGregor (1786-1845) had been a captain in the British army before enlisting in the service of the Venezuelan revolutionary Francisco Miranda, and joined Bolivar, with whom he seems to have had a falling out; see "Sir Gregor Macgregor," in *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen, 66 vols. (London, 1885-1901), 12:539. Mac Gregor's wife, the beautiful Doña Josepha, was Bolivar's niece.

³² Aury's activities at Amelia Island are chronicled in Davis, *MacGregor's Invasion of Florida*, pp. 33-56, and were widely reported in the American press; see, e.g., *National Intelligencer* (Washington) 11 October 1817, 18 October 1817, 3 January 1818, 10 January 1818, 10 February 1818, and 11 April 1818; *New York Spectator* (New York City) 19 December 1817. Aury's principal collaborator was

Pedro Gaul, New Granada's agent in the United States; for background on Gaul's remarkable career, see Harold A. Bierck, Jr., *Vida Publica de Don Pedro Gaul* (Caracas, 1944). To place the Amelia Island affair in its broad diplomatic and political context, see Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr., and Gene A. Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821* (Tuscaloosa, 1997), pp. 118-140, and William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and America's Global Empire* (Lexington, 1992), pp. 63-64. Many important documents related to MacGregor and Aury's activities at Amelia Island were printed in *American State Papers Foreign Relations*, 4:139-144, 183-202.

³³ Aury to J. D. Henley and James Bankhead, Headquarters, 22 December 1817, in *American State Papers Foreign Relations*, 4:149; see also Davis, *MacGregor's Invasion of Florida*, pp. 51-56. An unsigned history of MacGregor and Aury's occupation of Amelia Island appeared in the *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington) in the form of a letter to the editor that was printed on 26 February 1818.

³⁴ The story of Aury's run-in with the American criminal justice system in Charleston was reported in *Niles' Weekly Register*, 4 April 1818. At that time, there was a rumor current to the effect that Aury intended to head for the Bay of Samana to take possession of that part of Santo Domingo for use as a base for attacks on the Cuban port of Baracoa and the Venezuelan town of Angostura (Ciudad Bolivar); James M. Forbes to the Secretary of State, New York, 22 April 1818, in *Miscellaneous Letters and Related Materials, 1789-1906*, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³⁵ Ferro includes the text of this document, which is dated 3 June 1818, in an appendix to his *Vida de Luis Aury*, pp. 189-190.

³⁶ James J. Parsons, *San Andres and Providencia: English-Speaking Islands in the Western Caribbean*, University of California Publications in Geography Volume 12, No. 1 (Berkeley, 1956), is the best source of background information about Old Providence, but devotes only two pages to Aury's occupation. A reproduction of a contemporary drawing of the fort occupied by Aury is in the Archivo General de la Nacion, Bogota; see the online history of San Andres y Providencia by Juan Carlos Eastman Arango (originally published in 1992) posted on the World Wide Web (<http://www.banrep.gov.co/blassvirtual/credencial/hsana yp.htm>). News of Aury's capture of Old Providence appeared in *Niles' Weekly Register*, 26 September 1818; his proclamation of 10 July, characteristically titled "Liberty! Independence! or Death!", was reprinted in the 3 October 1818 number of the same publication.

³⁷ MacGregor managed to capture the ancient town of Portobello (in present-day Panama) on 8 April and occupied the place until 30 April 1819, when he was driven off by a Spanish force led by the governor of Panama; Davis, *MacGregor's Invasion of Florida*, p. 69; Bancroft, *Works, Volume VII, History of Central America*, pp. 498-501; see also the *Charleston Courier*, 24 April 1819, 29 May 1819, 10 June 1819, 12 June 1819, 21 June 1819; *Niles' Weekly Register*, 5 June 1819 and 3 July

1819. MacGregor's disastrous attack on Rio de la Hache in September 1819 was reported in the *Charleston Courier*, 18 November 1819. There were only 27 survivors, including the general, out of an assault force of about 250.

³⁸ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 31 July 1819.

³⁹ Bancroft, *History of Central America*, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁰ *Niles' Weekly Register*, 22 September 1821. An editorial in the *Charleston Courier*, 20 October 1819, declared: "Piracies on the ocean have become so frequent that they are matters of every-day occurrence, and are passed over with the some complacency as those minor acts of venality which too often escape punishment from their insignificance."

⁴¹ Simon Bolivar to Captain Luis Aury, Bogota, 18 January 1821; in *Cartas del Libertador: Corregidas Conforme a los Originales*, ed. Vicente Lecuna, 4 vols. (Caracas, 1929), 2:300. At the time, Bolivar was president of the republic of Colombia, which comprised the modern states of Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Aury suggested a project to liberate Panama in a letter to San Martin dated 7 February 1821; see Julio César González, "Una Invitación a San Martín para Independizar a Panamá," *Revista del Museo de la Casa de Gobierno* (1958) 1:27-37.

⁴² Aury's death on Old Providence was reported in the *National Intelligencer*, 8 December 1821. The circumstances surrounding his demise are described in Ferro, *Vida de Luis Aury*, pp. 159-164. An inventory of his estate, duly attested by his closest followers, is preserved in the Aury Papers. On behalf of the late commodore's estate, these same executors also formulated a bill for services rendered to the government of New Granada, seeking \$49,4520.20_ as reimbursement for personal funds advanced to the revolutionary cause by Aury since 1814. The bill was never paid, and indeed may never have been presented. Not surprisingly, later writers offered alternative endings to the life of Aury. Henderson Yoakum was of the opinion that Aury retired to Cuba after the end of his Old Providence adventure; *History of Texas*, 1:194. This is apparently the source used by Hubert Howe Bancroft, who reported in his *History of the North Mexican States and Mexico*: "After serving the cause of the patriots for some years, Aury returned to New Orleans, and being a man of fine appearance, married a rich widow, from whom, however, he was separated some time afterward. As late as 1845 he was residing at Habana" (p. 39, footnote 15); cf. *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, ed. James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, 6 vols. (New York, 1887-89), 1:119.

⁴³ Parsons, *San Andres and Providencia*, p. 21. *Niles' Weekly Register*, 13 July 1822, reported that nine

vessels remained there from Aury's squadron when Old Providence was annexed to Gran Colombia.

⁴⁴ Alfred Hasbrouck, "Gregor McGregor and the Colonization of Poyais, Between 1820 and 1824," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 7 (1927):438-459.

⁴⁵ Ferro, *Vida de Luis Aury*, pp. 172, 175-176. Lacroix's *Diario de Bucaramango*, composed in 1828, was published in Paris in 1869. For biographical data on Lacroix (1780-1837), see Sergio Elías Ortiz, *Franceses en la Independencia de la Gran Colombia* (Bogota, 1949), pp. 119-125.

⁴⁶ Ferro, *Vida de Luis Aury*, pp. 173-174. There is no serviceable biography of Agustín Codazzi (1793-1859) in English; however, the Biblioteca Virtual of the Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Bogota, offers an online article by Beatriz Caballero, "Agustín Codazzi, Militar y Aventurero," from the 1993 number of *Revista Credencial Historia* (<http://www.banrep.gov.co/blaavirtual/credencial/hac.htm>), which also contains information about Codazzi's friend Ferrari (1785-1851). Codazzi wrote his memoirs in French and there is a Spanish translation, *Las Memorias*, trans. and ed. Marisa Vannini de Gerulewicz (Caracas, 1970), but the present writer has no knowledge of the existence of an English edition.

⁴⁷ The documents relating to Schumph and Lafitte have been published by the Instituto de Cultura de Yucatan in *Documentos Historicos Peninsulares* (Merida, 1995), 1:160-178; cf. J. Ignacio Rubio Mañé, "Los Lafitte, Famosos Piratas y sus ultimas dias en Yucatan," *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística* 54 (1940):452-481.

⁴⁸ Lyle Saxon, *Lafitte the Pirate* (New York, 1930), pp. 214-217; Jack C. Ramsay, Jr., *Jean Lafitte: Prince of Pirates* (Austin, 1996), pp. 90-92, 93-97, 108; Donald E. Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821* (Austin, 1992), pp. 238-239; Federal Writers Project, *Texas: A Guide to the Line Star State*, American Guide Series (New York, 1945), pp. 90-91; Jesse A. Ziegler, *Wave of the Gulf* (1938), pp. 214-215; Donald W. Whisenhunt, ed., *Texas: A Sesquicentennial Celebration* (Austin, 1984), pp. 47-48; David G. McComb, *Texas: A Modern History* (Austin, 1989), pp. 32-33.

⁴⁹ See the article on Aury in the Handbook of Texas Online (<http://www/tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/viewAA/fau4.html>).

⁵⁰ See Ortiz, *Franceses en la Independencia de la Gran Colombia*, pp. 138-143; Hector Humberto Samayoa Guevara, *La Presencia de Luis Aury en Centro America* (Guatemala, 1965); E. Posada, "Luis Aury," *Boletín de Historia y Antigüedades* 7 (1911):337-367; and the bibliography in Ferro, *Vida de Luis Aury*, pp. 261-269.

The Great Stroke of Stanley Faye

Don C. Marler

Stanley Faye's works on the privateering activities of Pierre and Jean Laffite contain inexplicable contradictions and reversals. In this piece the author will point up some of these reversals and suggest possible explanations for these blunders.

In 1928 after years of prodigious research, Stanley Faye wrote *Privateers of the Gulf* which exists today in manuscript form at the University of Texas and has recently been published in book form.¹ He was unsuccessful in getting the 429 page manuscript accepted for publication as an historical document. In desperation, or at least exasperation, he wrote a fictional chapter, inserted it into the manuscript, and attempted to get the whole published as fiction through the influence of his friend J. Frank Dobie. In a letter to Dobie he described his fictional chapter as horrible; one cannot disagree.² The chapter is totally out of place, inappropriate, annoying and distracting. He took care that this chapter should be understood as fiction. This attempt at fiction was a pathetic gesture. Dobie was apparently not impressed and could not have had the manuscript published as fiction even if he tried. There is no evidence that he tried to get it published. Faye sent the manuscript to Dobie in 1934 and in 1943 it was given to the University of Texas by the Dobie trust.

The manuscript reveals a detailed knowledge of the political and economic interaction and intrigues between the United States, Louisiana, Spain, Spanish possessions in North America and the Baratarians privateers, especially Jean and Pierre Laffite -- the brothers Laffite. Faye was fluent in French as well as English and knew the Spanish language as well. His research extended deep into documents in these languages. The manuscript is clearly a serious attempt at an historical account of Gulf coast privateering and pirating with the brothers Laffite as central characters in the story. In the years following 1928 he used the manuscript as the basis for five articles published in the *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*.³ One of those articles was "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite."⁴ Published in 1940, [93 pages and 7 chapters] this article was inexplicably a reversal of many of the findings and conclusions he reached regarding Jean and Pierre Laffite in the meticulously

researched *Privateers of the Gulf*. In *Privateers of the Gulf* he presented Jean Laffite as dominant and Pierre as the secondary character, while in the "Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite" their roles were reversed.

The following are examples of many such reversals.

Legend: GS = Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite"

MS = manuscript for *Privateers of the Gulf*.

Page numbers for the MS are as they appear in the recently published *Privateers of the Gulf*.

Regarding the brother's quality of mind and ability to write:

MS. (p.169) "If this composition passed through the hands of an editor ...the task of revision was left incomplete. The text bears undeniably the mark of the elder brother, the self-important Pierre, putting himself at the head of an enterprise that was carried out not by him but by his junior."

MS. (p. 186) "Luis Payne, the Havana interpreter who put Pierre's French original into Spanish a century and a decade ago is unmistakably struggling not only with bad French grammar and diction but also with a turbidity of thought far different from John Lafittes lucidity."

MS. (p. 85-A) "Although he [Pierre] had at least enough education to write an incompetent letter, his manners cannot have been of the best.

MS. (pp. 85-A, 86) "Of the thousands of letters that serve as sources for these printed pages, only a few stand out as literary compositions. Of the hundreds of contemporary writers from whose pens those letters came, priests, statesmen, officers of every sort, private citizens of many stations in life, only three distinguished themselves as masters of verbal expression. One is John Quincy Adams, a college professor of English literature, secretary of state and president of the United States. The second is Major Arsène Lacarriène Latour, graduate of the Polytechnical School of France and author

of the one standard American historical essay on the Battle of New Orleans. The third is John Lafitte."

Compare the above to the great stroke article items following.

GS. (p.753) "Pierre Laffite possessed an orderly and disciplined mind..."

GS. (pp. 764-5) "Everywhere throughout the letter's length the little mind of Jean Laffite confessed its littleness.... The other letter reflected the light of the elder brother's thought."

GS. (p. 787) "No man in New Orleans could write more cleverly than Pierre Lafitte."

GS. (p. 818) "Therefore he [Pierre] borrowed some of his brother's literary style..." [Faye seems to have been confused here since throughout this article he trounced Jean's literary style. He praised Jean's style in *Privateers of the Gulf*.]

On the brother's quality of mind and ability to read men's minds:

MS. (pp. 12-13) John Lafitte, "...dominated the minds of men about him, now and then by physical force but more often by exercise of a brain that always worked in advance of other men's thoughts. John Lafitte, whom tradition presents as a romantic, was by nature as clever a politician as America ever produced."

MS. (p. 49) "...John Lafitte with uncanny knowledge of men's minds...."

GS. (p. 740) "...in all New Orleans no man was more clever than Pierre Lafitte. The smuggler boss was basing his new fortune on his ability to read men's minds..."

MS. (p. 15) "John Lafitte, it is true, had most of the family allotment of brains, but Pierre was the elder and therefore, according to European conventions, the one to whom the other must defer. The inconsistency of nature, whereby one brother gained superior position and the other the intelligence that that position demanded, offered reason for the early development of the younger man's genius for diplomacy. His first task was to reverse the disparity existing between him and his senior. He succeeded, and succeeded so cleverly that not even his brother seems to

have suspected a change in their relationship."

MS. (p. 91) "This is the self-important Pierre, the head of the family firm, approving his younger brother's acts and assuming command in Grande Terre by right of the command he had abandoned in New Orleans. This is the brother who John Lafitte had besought John Blanque to free from imprisonment, 'A brother who is dear to me.... He is ill.' This is John Lafitte's elder brother, his only link with the world but sometimes, perhaps, a heavy chain to bear with other loads of responsibility."

GS. (p. 753) "In the Battle of New Orleans the Baratarian [Jean] acted as a topographic expert attached to General Jackson's volunteer staff while his townsman elder was serving as a private soldier. Ensuing celebrity confirmed in public estimation the importance of one brother and the negligible worth of the other... Pierre Lafitte did little if anything to correct the popular assumption." [That he was secondary].

The brother's ability to exercise citizenship and leadership:

MS. (p.170) "...because of a personal visit paid to him by the elder brother, Onis assumed that Pierre occupied the important place in the family firm. This assumption Onis had later to correct when John Lafitte took matters in his own hands."

MS. (p.14) "John Lafitte under proper guidance could have become a minor statesman. Without such direction he became for all time ... a master of intrigue..."

MS. (p. 12) "John Lafitte remains... the foremost citizen of New Orleans."

MS. References to Jean Laffite as the "Boss" or undisputed head of operations at Barataria and Galveston are ubiquitous, but in the GS it is a different story.

GS. (p. 750) "If Pierre Laffite indeed was known then as the Emperor of Barataria, his *cadet* acted on the coast and the bayous as viceroy."

GS. (p. 799) "The admiral of Barataria and father of Galveston [Pierre] came from New Orleans..."

GS. (p. 740) "In all of New Orleans no man was more clever than Pierre Lafitte."

MS. (p. 817) In the manuscript John Laffite is portrayed at every turn as clever but in the GS we read, "Jean Laffite's one inspired moment of cleverness had long since come and gone."

GS. Throughout this article Faye speaks of Pierre's prominence in New Orleans.

On Seeking the king's pardon:

In the "GS" it was Pierre who went to the priest to seek a pardon, while in the MS it was John. [Here Faye does introduce evidence to support his assertion].

On the Great Stroke:

Faye documented in *Privateers of the Gulf* that there were several great strokes planned and some attempted, all by John Laffite. Not one stroke is attributed to Pierre. In the "Great Stroke" article many strokes were planned, none of which were ever successfully implemented. All were planned by Pierre. The following are representative.

MS. (p.174) "[h]e [John] had not only to plan his "great stroke" against his friends the privateersmen and another against Gutierrez and Humbert..."

MS. (p. 142) "What plan John Lafitte had first proposed for the 'great stroke' ..."

GS. (p. 805) "Pierre's new plan for a great stroke..."

The name question:

Faye knew that the Laffites spelled their name "Laffite" but he insisted on spelling the name "Lafitte" and he consistently referred to Jean as John. In one of his letters to Dobie he went into excruciating detail as to why Jean and Pierre should have used the spelling he preferred.⁵ Why he could not honor their choice of spelling is a mystery. In changing it he added confusion to an already confused subject. In later published articles including the "Great Storke" he also used Laffite as did the brothers Laffite. In the great stroke article he praised the intendant of Havana for spelling Laffite as the brothers spelled it.

The discussion:

Clearly in Faye's 1928 work Jean Laffite was his hero. He missed no opportunity to heap praise on this hero who was presented as a bold, intelligent man of action capable of great literary composition, great loyalty and betrayal - clearly a complex character. He could coolly reverse course doing the unexpected. He could deceive with smoothness almost unequalled and still maintain a sense of dignity and integrity.

Did Faye identify so closely with his hero that he adopted his attributes and strategy? He had spent many years researching the *Privateers of the Gulf* only to be thwarted in its publication. Perhaps the publication problem was not so unsolvable after all. Could Faye have adopted the modus operandi of his hero; reversing everything to get the attention of publishers?

The contemporary public of the Laffites overwhelmingly saw Jean as the dominant player. This was evident in the perception of the viceroy of Mexico and in the perception of Gov. Claiborne, who focused his attention mostly on Jean. It was evident in the actions of Andrew Jackson, who recruited Jean as an aide and Pierre as a private soldier. It was evident in the attention Onís and a host of officers, and diplomats gave Jean over Pierre - not to mention the British offer to Jean (and not Pierre) during the War of 1812. Could they have all been wrong?

Faye's presentation of Jean Laffite as he was seen by his contemporaries, was greeted without enthusiasm - it was an old story. What could be done? Reverse the story - claim that Jean was the dunce and Pierre the real leader! The strategy worked to the extent that Faye was able to get a "book" published in the form of a 93-page, seven chapter article in a respected journal. Was the reversal strategy Stanley Faye's Great Stroke?

The stroke of Stanley Faye was not just a great stroke; it was an amazing stroke. Jean Laffite, who in the *Privateers of the Gulf* was the master planner, the "Boss", brilliant writer (in a class with John Quincy Adams), more clever than all, so diplomatic he (in spite of European tradition) usurped the position accorded the elder brother without the elder realizing it. He, who was described as one of the cleverest politicians in America and was always ahead of his opponent, was reduced, by fiat, in "The Great Stroke" to a person who possessed none of the attributes described above; they

now belonged to the elder brother. Suddenly Jean was not the "Boss"; he had only one clever moment, he couldn't write without revealing the smallness of his mind, he never planned even one great stroke and was always subservient to his brother. Furthermore, whereas in the *Privateers of the Gulf*, the public looked to Jean, suddenly in the GS the public looked to Pierre as the leader, the clever one. It is an amazing transformation this -- made by Faye.

Some of the author's colleagues ⁶ think this view is unfair preferring to believe that he learned more in later research that changed his thinking. This argument is weakened by the fact that most of the evidence he used in the "Great Stroke" to support his presentation of Pierre is the same evidence he used in the manuscript to support Jean as the dominant brother. Little new evidence was presented in the "Great Stroke". In the opinion of this author he simply made contrary assertions without new evidence. The major new material he presented in the "Great Stroke" was his claim that Pierre's death in America occurred sometime after Andrew Jackson became president and that Pierre not John went to the priest seeking the king's pardon. The information about Pierre's death is highly questionable. The argument is further weakened by lack of reference in the "Great Stroke" to the previous work that he was still trying to get published. As far as has been determined by this author he never gave any explanation of the conflicts in his written material. If both the manuscript and the great stroke article had been published in close proximity to each other with no explanation of their wide unexplained disparities, Faye would have been ridiculed. Historical distance may make the discrepancies less glaring but they are not completely obscured.

Why did he reverse his position in the great stroke article and make John the dunce and Pierre the hero? Both documents cannot be true so which is the more authentic? What was the rationale behind such a dramatic repudiation of so many of the conclusions he had reached after such careful study and documentation?

Were his efforts the product of frenetic activity perhaps arising from an existential crisis? He wrote for several historical associations and his writings had been

published many times, so recognition was not lacking. Did he over identify with Jean Laffite to the point that he also engaged in duplicity? Was he so hurt and angry by the rejection of his work by publishers that he decided to parallel his own story with that of the Laffites. Such a parallel would involve playing a role similar to that of a double agent - a deceiver. He would deceive those who had rejected him (publishers) by reversing his conclusion (i.e. present Pierre as dominant) in opposition to his documentation of Jean's (John's) dominance. This act would be parallel to the Laffites' defection to Spain after their rejection by the Americans. The danger involved in playing the role of double agent no doubt has a thrilling aspect. Did Faye enjoy putting his professional career at risk as it would have been if both accounts had been published? A personal sense of power may have accompanied his successful deception of the journal editors and its readers.

Did Faye have an honest change of mind about the relative dominance/competence of the brothers Laffite? One would think an honest change of mind, in one so meticulous as Faye, would have been accompanied by documentation or at least an explanation of what had caused such a drastic change. No record of such documentation or explanation has been found. The lack of such explanation raises question about Faye's reliability.

Answers to these questions will likely never be known, but close reading of *Privateers of the Gulf* and "The Great Stroke" will however raise disturbing questions about this complicated man.

Endnotes

1. Stanley Faye, *Privateers of the Gulf* (Hemphill, Texas: Dogwood Press, 2001).
2. Ibid. p. 225.
3. Jean L. Epperson, "Stanley Faye and Jean Laffite," *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, Vol. VII, No. 1, 2001.
4. Stanley Faye, "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3, July 1940, 733-826.
5. Stanley Faye, *Privateers of the Gulf* (Hemphill, Texas: Dogwood Press, 2001), pp. 223-225.
6. Private communication from Jean L. Epperson and Robert Vogel--2001.

Cobs

Reginald Wilson

Gold and silver coins (cobs) were not struck primarily for circulation but as an expedient means for sending bullion in fixed quantities, easily divisible, back to treasuries in Spain and ultimately to the melting pots of Europe. For this reason alone, were it not for all the sea salvage cobs being brought on the market from shipwrecks, many surviving cobs would be scarce, despite their vast mintage. Even with the infusion of sea salvage material, many types and dates of cobs are rare.

Gold cobs are in the denominations of 8, 4, 2, and 1 escudos. The 8 escudos is known as a "doubloon". The usual denominations in silver are 8, 4, 2, 1, and 1/2 reales with the term "pieces of eight" frequently used. A doubloon was equal to 16 of the silver 8 reales. The amount of fine gold in a gold cob is 91.7%. The amount of silver in a reales is 93.1%, but this varied depending on the period. The weight of both was a little over 27 grams. Gold and silver cobs were produced not only in the New World but also in Spain for use in Spain, yet in the Mother country not so late nor in the quantities so vast as those engendered by the rich finds of precious metal in America, and their remittance in cob form across the Atlantic to Spain.

Now let us observe the elements of design on cobs. The reverse side of a typical gold or silver cob is a good place to begin because it is much simpler than the obverse or "head" side. The reverse of a Spanish colonial cob of all denominations, gold or silver, bears a cross. This cross symbolizes the union of Church and State and consists of no more than two straight lines of equal length bisecting the cob. There is a wide variation in the style of the ends of these crosses. Likewise, there is a wide variation within the four quadrants of nearly all silver cobs. There may be fleur-de-lis of varying styles, lions, castles, small circle or rings, crowns, scrolls or rosettes.

On the obverse side, there are basically two types of design. The first presents the reigning monarch's shield in detail; the second replaces that shield with pillars, cross bars and waves. It can be said in general the elements of the shield of a given king represented the lands that he or his forebears controlled. The upper left

lions and castles represent the regions of Leon and Castile. The inclusion of still another two lions on the bottom half of the shield confirms the popularity of the lion as regional symbol of power of other kingdoms of Europe. Fleurs-de-lis are commonly evocation of France, or regions of France. Spain once controlled Naples and the Island of Sicily. The solid horizontal bar is typically Austrian. Tirol (or Tyrol) is symbolized by the eagle. Parts of the low countries like Flanders, and Brabant came under the Spanish crown with Charles I. The unadorned vertical lines represent Aragon, joined to Castile and Leon by the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon to Isabel of Castile, who together conquered Granada from the Moors in 1492.

The other type of design on the obverse side is the pillars and waves. This concept is built around a single tic-tac-toe block of nine spaces. The top left is the first letter of the city where the cob was minted. In the top middle is the denomination. In the top right space is the initial of the assayer. In the middle three horizontal spaces appear the Latin PLUS ULTRA. In the bottom three spaces is the three digit date.

The elements of the shield and their configuration not only changed from king to king, and often from mint to mint, but even sometimes from period to period of the same king at the same mint. Some cobs were dated, others were not. The countries that minted cobs were: Mexico, Bolivia, Panama, Columbia, Santo Domingo, Guatemala, Argentina, Venezuela, and Honduras. Mexico, Bolivia, and Peru had more than one mint.

The present day value of cobs varies widely in value depending on scarcity, condition, and popularity for certain coins. In general the 8 escudos gold cobs range in value from \$4,000 to \$8,000. The silver 8 reales cobs (pieces of eight) recovered from treasure ships range in value from \$600 to \$1,800. The New World shipped huge amounts of silver, gold, and precious jewels to Spain. In Potosi alone, there was one mountain that was almost pure silver. Author-historian John S. Potter Jr., an authority on Spain's treasure fleets, determined the treasure shipped to Spain to be worth more than \$20 billion today. The manifest

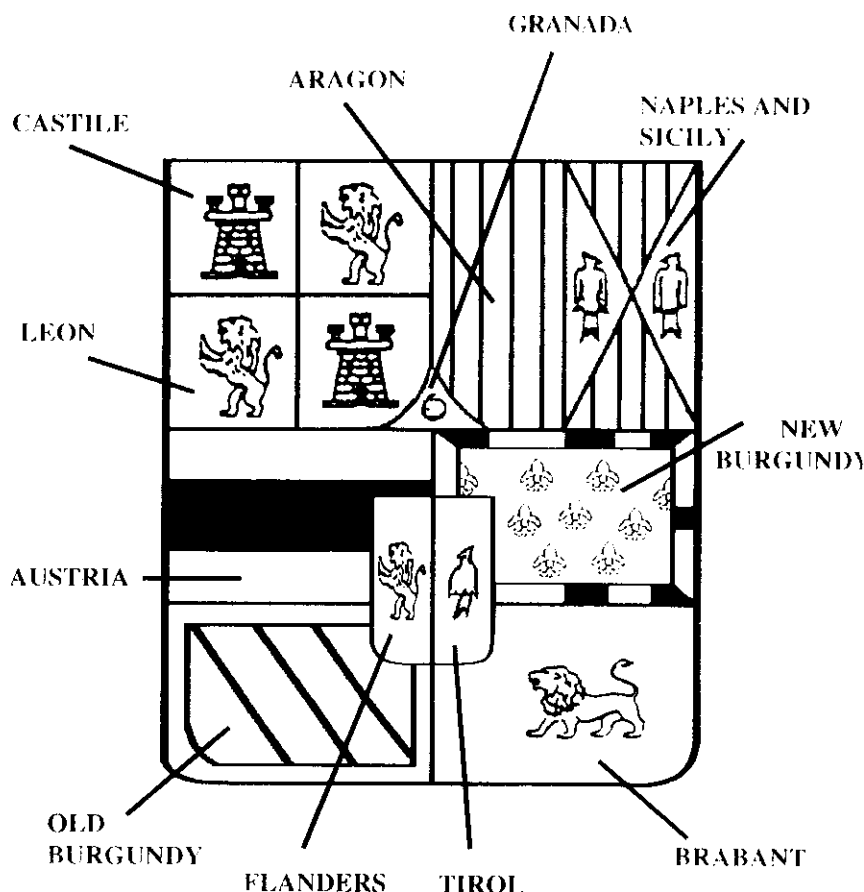
of the vessel *Atocha* was 1000 pages long. This galleon carried 901 registered ingots of silver, more than 250,000 silver pieces of eight, and 161 separate gold pieces, some of them weighting several pounds. In order to circumvent paying the king's royal fifth, it is estimated that up to 40% of treasure was not listed on the manifest.

This influx of wealth in Spain caused severe inflation. The price of a loaf of bread advanced from 10 cents a loaf to \$4.00.!

Bibliography

1. Grissim, John *The Lost Treasure of Conception*, New York: William Morrow and Co., 1980.
2. Lyon, Eugene *The Search for the Atocha*, New York: Harper and Row, 1979.
3. Sedwick and Sedwick *The Practical Book of Coins*, Orlando: 1995, Third ed.

BASIC HAPSBURG SHIELD



Potosí, 8 reales, erasure of former assayer's initial between mintmark P and assayer C. Formerly thought to be an issue of La Plata.



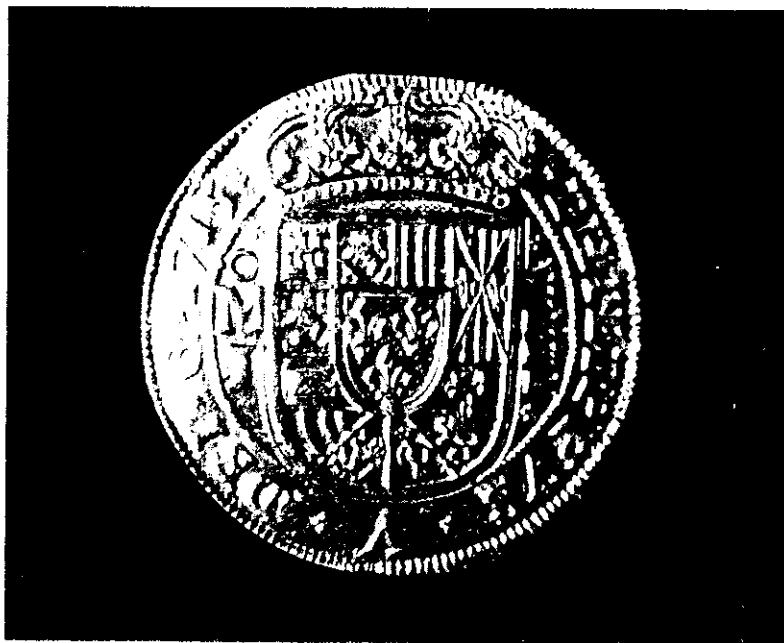
Lima, 8 reales, 1660, mintmark L (and star), assayer V, unauthorized issue.



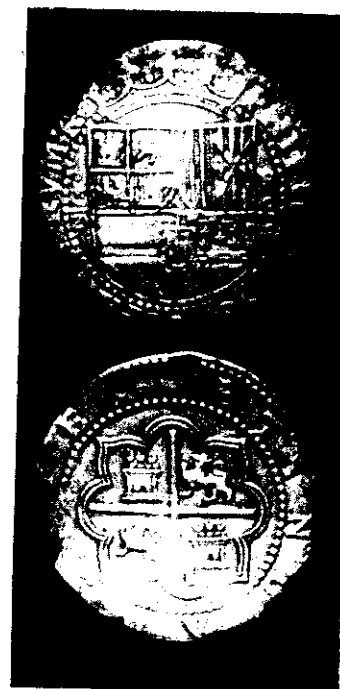
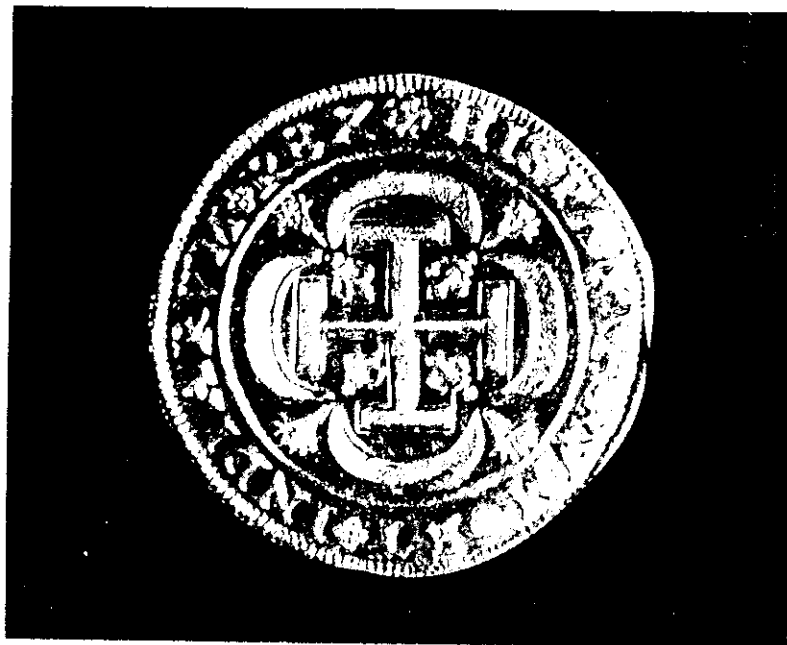
Lima, 8 reales, 1722M, three dates, royal.



Lima, 2 reales, 1694M.



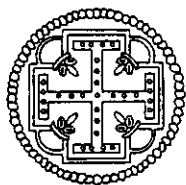
Enlargement of a Mexican 8 escudos, 1715J, royal, found on a beach in Florida, 1715 fleet. Note area of coral among the letters of PHILIPPVS. (Photo by Ernest Richards)



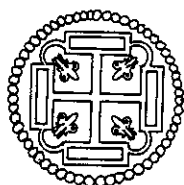
Lima. 8 reales, assayer Diego de la Torre: star and 8 to left of shield, mintmark P and assayer oD to right.

**CROSS SIDE OF TYPICAL CHARLES II
MEXICAN 8 ESCUDOS OF THE 1690'S**

"JEWELLED CROSS"



PLAIN CROSS

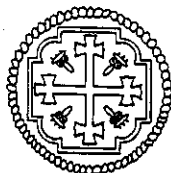


CROSS SIDE OF PHILIP V MEXICAN 8 ESCUDOS

**1702-1710 AND VARIETY
OF 1711-1713**



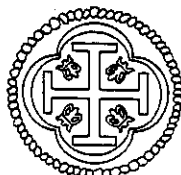
1711, 1712, 1713



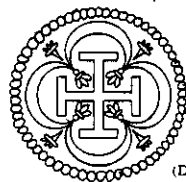
VARIETY OF 1711 AND 1712



1714, 1715



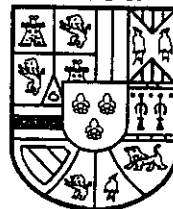
**VARIETY OF 1714, 1715, AND
ALL ROYALS 1714, 1715**



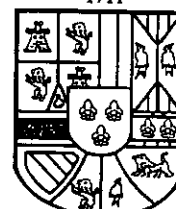
(Drawings by Ernest Richards)

**BOURBON SHIELD, PHILIP V,
MEXICAN 8 ESCUDOS, 1702-1715**

1702-1710



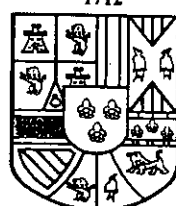
1711



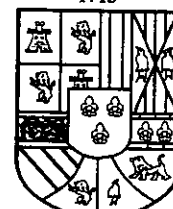
1712



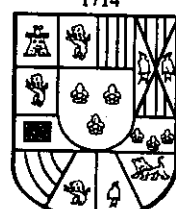
1712



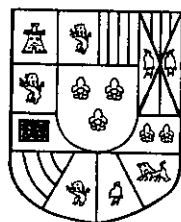
1713



1714



1715



The number, size, and alignment of small fleurs-de-lis under Naples-Sicily can vary. What is shown is merely most typical of the given year. The three fleurs-de-lis forming a triangle in the center of the shield do not vary.

SUMMARIES OF MINUTES OF LAFFITE SOCIETY MEETINGS

July, 2001 through December, 2001

Dorothy McD. Karilanovic

July 10, 2001

Minutes of the June meeting, recorded by Press Director Dave Roberts in the absence of Dorothy Karilanovic, Secretary, who was out of town, were approved as read by the Secretary.

Treasurer, Jerry Eubank, reported a balance in the Laffite Society account on this date of \$3,382.79.

President Jeff Modzelewski read to members the Laffite Society Secretary's March 29 English translation of a report on an analysis of the handwriting in the controversial document, *The Journal of Jean Laffite: the Privateer-Patriot's Own Story*, prepared by French Laffite Society member Patrick Lafitte. Mr. Lafitte's report was intended for a seminar held at The University of Texas in Austin, TX on March 9, 2001, entitled *The French in Texas*, sponsored by the departments of Italian and French at the university. Due to time limits, and as no English translation was available at that time, the paper was not presented at the seminar. Following the reading, members discussed various conclusions observed in the report questioning the authenticity of the handwriting in *The Journal*.

Referring to *Privateers of the Gulf*, from a copy of a type-written manuscript written in 1928 by Stanley Faye, recently published by editor Don C. Marler of Dogwood Press, Dr. Reginald Wilson discussed quoted material from a letter written to Texas history writer J. Frank Dobie January 16, 1929 by Faye, who had lived and been educated in France. Paraphrasing from Faye's text, Dr. Wilson stated that, assuming that the Laffites were from Bordeaux or Bayonne, in the Languedoc region of southwestern France, it does not necessarily follow that they spoke French. In the 19th century and for generations the *Gascuono* dialect had been spoken fluently "by certainly half the

people, preferred to French by the working people . . . in some places used to the exclusion of French." Further, three dialects or separate languages, including *Gascuono*, which sounds like Spanish, were spoken in the Languedoc region, any one or all three of which, or a mixture, may have been spoken by the Laffites, thus possibly explaining why most of the French language used in *The Journal of Jean Laffite: the Privateer-Patriot's Own Story*, alleged to have been written by Jean Laffite, was not that of a well-educated speaker of French.

In his recent analysis of the handwriting in the controversial *Journal*, French researcher Patrick Lafitte has called attention to the omission from John A. Laffite's 1958 publication of this document of a sentence that mentions the city of Trujillo in Santo Domingo (cf. p. 193 of the original French text). Since the name "Port-au-Prince" was not changed to "Trujillo" until the years 1936 to 1961, the author of *The Journal*, which was allegedly written from 1845-1850, could only have known this if he had written it in 1936 or after.

Discussion followed on whether or not other sites names "Trujillo" existed in Santo Domingo in the 1800s to which the author of *The Journal* might have alluded.

President Jeff Modzelewski read to members from three letters written to Dr. Reginald Wilson from Laffite author/researcher Robert C. Vogel, referring to newspaper accounts of the purported death of Jean Laffite during a skirmish with a British warship. Quoting Vogel's reference, "the 'famous Laffite' was reported among the gang of pirates attacked by USS Alligator off Sugar Key, Cuba, in May, 1822 - he escaped, according to the officer in charge."

In another instance, Robert Vogel quoted, "British naval records clearly stated

a gun battle with pirates occurred off the Isle of Pines in March, 1823, when a RN [sic] sloop captured a ship commanded by the 'notorious Pepe'." Mr. Vogel further stated that "these two independent events, widely reported (and misreported) in the national press may have become the basis for the claim in future generations that Jean Laffite died at sea in 1823.

Former Member-at-Large Jim Nonus suggested that James De La Porta, possibly a cousin of Jean Laffite and who also served as his secretary, may have written *The Journal*. However, in this discussion, Dr. Reginald Wilson noted that De La Porta's handwriting appeared to be "completely different from that in *The Journal*."

August 14, 2001

Minutes of the July 10th meeting were approved as read to members by the Secretary.

Treasurer, Jerry Eubank, reported a balance in the Society's account this date of \$3,551.97.

Copies of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, Vol. VII, No. 2, October, 2001, were given out to members present.

President Jeff Modzelewski called attention to a book chapter on Jean Laffite, some theories of his origin and fate, recently completed and submitted by ex-officio President of The Laffite Society R. Dale Olson. The chapter will be included in a publication compiling historical research by contributors to a seminar entitled *The French in Texas*, held in March of this year and sponsored by the French and Italian departments at The University of Texas in Austin, TX.

Secretary Dorothy Karilanovic reported she had arranged for Professor Alex Pratt of College of the Mainland in Texas City, TX to speak to The Laffite Society on Tuesday, November 13, 2001, on the subject of slavery in Texas and in Galveston. At Professor Pratt's request, the Secretary will prepare and send a letter to him confirming the date and time, etc.

After a short discussion and review of Laffite Society funds available, members decided that funding of individual research investigation would not be feasible at this time due to the expense required. The committee formed to consider the proposal of Editor-of-Publications Don Marler is therefore dissolved.

Laffite Society Historian and Advisory Board Member Jean L. Epperson read to members her new article in the latest issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*,

"The Final Years of Jean Laffite," intended for the purpose of inspiring responses pro and con from readers on the theories presented. The article included a summary of theories and historical newspaper accounts of the reported death of Jean Laffite, leading Ms. Epperson to a logical conclusion that Laffite died "in the early months of 1823, probably in a sea battle with an, as yet, unknown adversary."

Other historical newspaper accounts possibly confirming Laffite's death at this time are being investigated by Laffite Society member, Gary Fretz of Fort Lauderdale, FL, and will be reported in due course.

Advisory Board member Dr. Reginald Wilson continued his discussion briefly on the Spanish practice of mining and transporting great quantities of silver from South America which had continued over several centuries. Dr. Wilson referred members to an article in a recent issue of *National Geographic Magazine* on pirates and privateers and the practice of transporting silver into Havana, Cuba, in the 15th and 16th centuries.

September 11, 2001

Meeting this date was canceled because of the terroristic attacks in New York City, Pennsylvania, and in Washington, D.C.

October 9, 2001

President Jeff Modzelewski called for volunteers to provide refreshments for the November 13 meeting on "Slavery in Texas," at which extra attendance is anticipated. Don Peak and Stephen Broadstone offered to contribute and other members were invited to bring a dish.

The President stated he would telephone Professor Alex Pratt, speaker for the November 13 date, to reconfirm date and to request a bio-sketch.

Minutes of the August 14 meeting were approved as read to members by the Secretary. Due to cancellation of the September 11 meeting, the date of the terroristic attacks in New York City, Pennsylvania, and in Washington, D.C., no Minutes were available for that month.

Treasurer, Jerry Eubank, submitted her report showing a balance as of October 9, '01 of \$3,067.83.

The President read to members a letter written in English from French Laffite Society member Patrick Lafitte, offering his condolences to his Laffitian friends following the disastrous September 11 attacks on our nation, to which President

Jeff Modzelewski responded with his thanks in a letter in French on behalf of The Laffite Society.

The President reported that Laffite researcher Gary Fretz from Fort Lauderdale, FL has offered to submit an article for publication in *The Laffite Society Chronicles* on his recent research based on newspaper articles from authentic South American sources on the death of Jean Laffite, reported to have occurred during a sea battle in the early months of 1823. The President further stated that prior to publication of the Fretz article, an editorial committee will have the opportunity to review it. Also, at some future date, as a collateral project, the President suggested the Society might want to publish an article summarizing important research contributions by its major researchers, centering around the evidence on file for Jean Laffite's survival and life in anonymity as a resident of St. Louis, MO and Alton, IL.

According to Dr. Reginald Wilson, Advisory Board Member Pam Keyes of Miami, OK now has a Web Page focusing on court cases involving Pierre Laffite from 1800-1835, as well as on members of the New Orleans Association.

Historian Jean L. Epperson read to members an e-mail letter from Laffite researcher Gary Fretz in which he referred to a newspaper article quoted from the *Gaceta de Colombia* from April 20, 1823, stating that Jean Laffite was killed in a battle with two Spanish vessels off Omoa, Honduras, February 4, 1823. According to Mr. Fretz in his e-mail letter, the above information was provided to him in August, '01 in an English translation by Paula Covington, Latin American and Iberian Bibliographer at Vanderbilt University. Subsequent to receipt of this initial English translation, Mr. Fretz forwarded a copy of the original news article in Spanish to President Jeff Modzelewski who provided a second English translation which was essentially in agreement with the Vanderbilt version.

Following receipt of the news article in Spanish, an exchange of correspondence occurred briefly between the President and Mr. Fretz on the possible meaning of the word "Viento" as used in the news article to refer to the coastal site near which the sea battle may have occurred - "Viento de Omoa." It was suggested, but not decided conclusively, that the word "viento" may have referred to a sea term describing a course or direction, or a "land breeze" possibly, rather than to mean "wind" as is its usual meaning.

In further reference to the description of the Spanish schooner given in the translation, Laffite Society member and nautical archeologist Tom Oertling offered the opinion by e-mail that the word "coliza" (or "colisa") in the Spanish text might refer to a "pivot gun" located amidships rather than at the stern of the ship.

Mr. Fretz further stated in his August e-mail correspondence that he had sent an inquiry on the newspaper report of Laffite's death in 1823 to the Latin American section at Duke University's library, suggesting that more information on the fate of the famous privateer, who was also venerated as a revolutionary in the struggle for independence, might be available from Colombian, South American naval logs.

For members' interest, Mr. Fretz also forwarded to Ms. Jean L. Epperson a copy of his biography.

Advisory Board Member and a leading Laffite Society researcher Dr. Reginald Wilson provided a brief oral summary of major goals accomplished to date by Laffite Society researchers since inception of the Society in July, 1994.

Dr. Wilson also reported that Susan Baker Hunger, Member-at-Large, had searched the Baltimore, MD marriage certificate files via the Internet for evidence of a marriage contracted in 1831 between Emma Mortimer and Jean Laffite. The marriage was stated to have occurred, according to Laffite in his controversial "journal" alleged to have been written under his own hand. The search produced no findings. Dr. Wilson suggested that the marriage might have taken place in South Carolina, possibly in Charleston. Ms. Hunger offered to continue an Internet search.

Advisory Board Member R. Dale Olson mentioned possible future travel sites in association with Laffite Society research interests: 1) Soto la Marina, MX; 2) Veracruz, MX; 3) Yucatan Peninsula, MX; 4) Bordeaux, France; 5) Cartagena, Colombia, S.A.; 6) Havana, Cuba; 7) Palacios, TX; 8) Matagorda Bay, TX; 9) New Orleans, LA (annual Louisiana Historical Society meeting in January).

November 13, 2001

The President called the meeting to order with welcoming remarks to members and the many visitors in attendance, followed by a brief description of the Society's goals and interests for the benefit

of students from Prof. Alex Pratt's class and other visitors present.

After the opening remarks, Professor Alex Pratt from College of the Mainland at Texas City, TX, gave a talk on the history of slavery in Texas and on Galveston Island, in association with the Society's interest in the smuggling and selling of slaves practiced in the 19th century by Jean and Pierre Laffite and their contemporaries. To accompany his talk, Professor Pratt provided the audience with copies of early newspaper articles describing conditions of life, slavery laws and codes as they existed in Texas at that time.

Minutes of the October 9, 2001 meeting were approved as read to members by the Secretary.

Treasurer, Jerry Eubank, reported the current balance on today's date as \$3,077.91.

The President reported that Laffite Society author and researcher Robert C. Vogel and his wife Kathleen Taylor Vogel had visited the island for several days the previous week.

Laffite Society member and researcher Gary Fretz from Ft. Lauderdale, FL mentioned in a recent e-mail letter the possibility of arranging for two Spanish translators to assist in research in South America on news articles in that country relating to the reported death of Jean Laffite in a sea battle in 1823.

A short discussion was taken up on a previous proposal to make some funds available for researchers. Parliamentarian Diane Olson suggested that, since the Society's financial resources are limited, requests for funding could be considered on an individual basis for short-term projects and a cap placed on funds permitted for use.

Richard Prather, Member-at-Large, suggested that, instead of offering honoraria to potential speakers, the Society might consider giving an honorary membership.

In a recent e-mail letter to Jean L. Epperson, Laffite researcher Gary Fretz reported that, beneath layers of paint on the canvas of the work known as *The Gambler*, attributed to Jarvis, the name of "Ames" was uncovered.

Member-at-Large Richard Prather gave to the Secretary for the archive an article dated Sunday, November 4, 2001, from *The Houston Chronicle* concerning a sunken vessel found in a little known lake off of the Trinity River, 35 miles from Galveston, long believed by some to have belonged to Jean Laffite. State marine archeologists want to officially examine the site. Laffite Society researchers Jean L. Epperson and Robert C. Vogel were quoted in the article.

Due to time limits, a reading and discussion of the article was deferred until the next regularly scheduled general meeting.

Discussion followed on plans for travel in the spring along the Texas coast to Palacios, TX, to Soto la Marina, MX, and, possibly, to Veracruz, MX. Third Vice-President and Special Events Chairman Kathy Modzelewski will gather information on these areas to present at a future meeting.

Instead of the regular meeting, The Laffite Society will hold its annual holiday party and covered dish buffet at The Eiband Gallery on Tuesday, December 11, 2001.

December 11, 2001

The Society celebrated its annual Holiday Party and no meeting was held.

CALENDAR

General meetings of The Laffite Society are held on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:00 p.m. at the Eiband's Gallery, 2201 Postoffice Street, Galveston, TX., 77550, (409) 763 5495. 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 to President Jeff Modzelewski (409 000000). 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

At the suggestion of Reginald Wilson we are starting a Bulletin Board (BB) on a trial basis. It may be limited in issues where space is scarce. The BB can be used to post short notes announcing events, requesting information or assistance with Laffite Society related subjects. It can be used for submission of suggestions for the Society including suggestions for improving *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. If you have a message for the BB send it to the editor of the *Laffite Society Chronicles*.

New Members

There were no new members in the last half of the year.

**THE LAFFITE SOCIETY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

AUGUST 2000-JULY 2002

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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