



# The Laffite Society Chronicles

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## THE EDITOR'S PAGE

JEFF MODZELEWSKI

Dear Laffite Society members,

I am happy to present you with this, the ninth semiannual issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. In its "Meeting Summaries and Abstracts" section, this issue focuses on Society activity for the period of July through December, 1998. This edition also contains other articles of relevance to the Society's theme.

Several factors contribute to the continuing high quality of our publication.

Readers will note that, for the second consecutive issue, *The Laffite Society Chronicles* contains a page in color. In the previous issue, the Jean Laffite privateer seal and signature received this treatment; in this edition, various Laffite-era flags are presented in color as an accompaniment to the article authored by Jean L. Epperson titled "Flags Flown at Galveston by the Corsairs and Filibusters."

While color graphics enhance the appeal of the publication, they are also more costly than are black-and-white illustrations. However, the added cost for color in both this *The Laffite Society Chronicles* and the last was generously underwritten by donations of Laffite Society members, thus exerting no negative impact upon our treasury.

In addition to these color graphics, readers will note in recent issues the appearance of scanned photographs of relevance to our group. The generosity of Laffite Society members has made available a computer scanner for use, thus enabling the inclusion of black-and-white pictures in the *Chronicles* at, again, no cost to the Society.

Laffite Society members continue to contribute articles for publication in the *Chronicles*, so much so that this editor finds himself in the happy position of possessing a backlog of material with which to work. Rather than have to scrape together as much textual and graphical filler as can be found in order to meet our projected length for each issue, we can pick and choose, alternating articles of different flavors and bents and with different amounts of illustration, to achieve a continuity in well-

rounded representation of the issues and tones which flavor our studies of our buccaneer.

This issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles* is the first published by our third biennial Board of Directors. Laffite Society Board members serve two-year terms beginning in August of one year and finishing in July two years later. The current Board (see the roster on the last page of this *Chronicles*) will serve from August, 1998, through July, 2000.

Effective with this just-begun biennial term, the Board of Directors initiated an Advisory Board. The purpose of this administrative designation is to acknowledge the expertise and contributions of a number of seasoned Laffite Society members who are perhaps not able to regularly attend Board and general meetings and thus make a contribution in person, but who contribute much in the way of knowledge, articles, advice, and artifacts *in absentia*. In its inaugural term, The Laffite Society Advisory Board consists of eight members; this roster is also listed on the last page of this publication.

As the torch passes from one Board of Directors to the next, it is proper, fitting, and with much gratitude that I acknowledge, on behalf of many Laffite Society members, guests, and visitors, the contributions of founding member and new past-President R. Dale Olson.

To those who are privileged to call Dale a friend, to extol his talents would be redundant; to those unacquainted with Dale, any such attempt would fall far short of its mark. A polished public speaker of stately presence, an active mind with an interest in - and more than a cursory knowledge of - varied and diverse subjects, and, last but not least, a genuinely good person, Dale is the proverbial "tough act to follow." We thank him for serving as President of The Laffite Society for its first four years, and look forward to his continuing involvement in its activities.

*Jeff Modzelewski*

## THE VESSELS

WIL ZAPALAC

[Editor's note: this article is one of a series authored by professional seaman and Laffite Society board member Wil Zapalac. See prior issues of *The Laffite Society Chronicles* for other installments.]

Yet another jewel to be pulled from the deep, deep treasure chest of mysteries connected to the "offshore business" of Jean Laffite is an actual drawing or description of a vessel belonging to his squadron of privateers.

And, as always, it seems the mystery is indeed much like an on-again, off-again specter, dancing in and out of the fog between the point from which the observer observes and that at which the horizon ends.

Or begins.

A tantalizingly illusive image.

"So get to the point," the reader grumbles. "Just what *did* Laffite's ship look like?"

*Qui savoir?*, as the French say. Who knows, who knows?

This consideration of the flagship or favorite vessel which the "Commandante" preferred for his sailings leads on to yet another mystery, even before one can correct for assumption. Which ship?

The brown (or was it black?) *Jupiter*? Or the *Pride*? Both are listed here and there in the mists and lists. Which ship was the "black, clipper-built schooner" - a vessel acknowledged as "the very beau-ideal of a pirate"? The ship that had been spotted by Captain Lawrence Kearny's attachment when it arrived to inform the "Old Man" (as the wife of one of the privateer's captains, James Campbell, referred to Laffite) of the desire of the United States that he vacate Galveston Isle?

Or were the *Jupiter* and the *Pride* one and the same?

The meat of the matter is just how tricky the "Bos" chose to be on any given day. Laffite obviously paid no heed to the old maritime superstition that calamity comes to the vessel that has been renamed. Ships appeared and disappeared like so many cigars. So, what does one do when one runs out of cigars? Why, "procure" another box. Is not that so?

From this writer's experience with boats and ships, there is really only one thing they can be counted on to do, and that is to retain their

ability to sink. Fickle and unpredictable, they are as vulnerable to detriments found in larger ships as to those of small, one-man ketches. Dealt the combination of the ungodly trickiness of wind and current along with that caused by failure of on-board tackle and/or mechanics, a sailor or captain always has his hands full.

It would be safe to assume, perhaps, that Laffite and his men may have used a vessel similar to the "lugger" of the accompanying illustration. Though a little clunky, the lugger was perfectly capable of shallow-water work - a smuggler's delight, really. The cut of its design, so piratical and effective, was outlawed for some time in England.

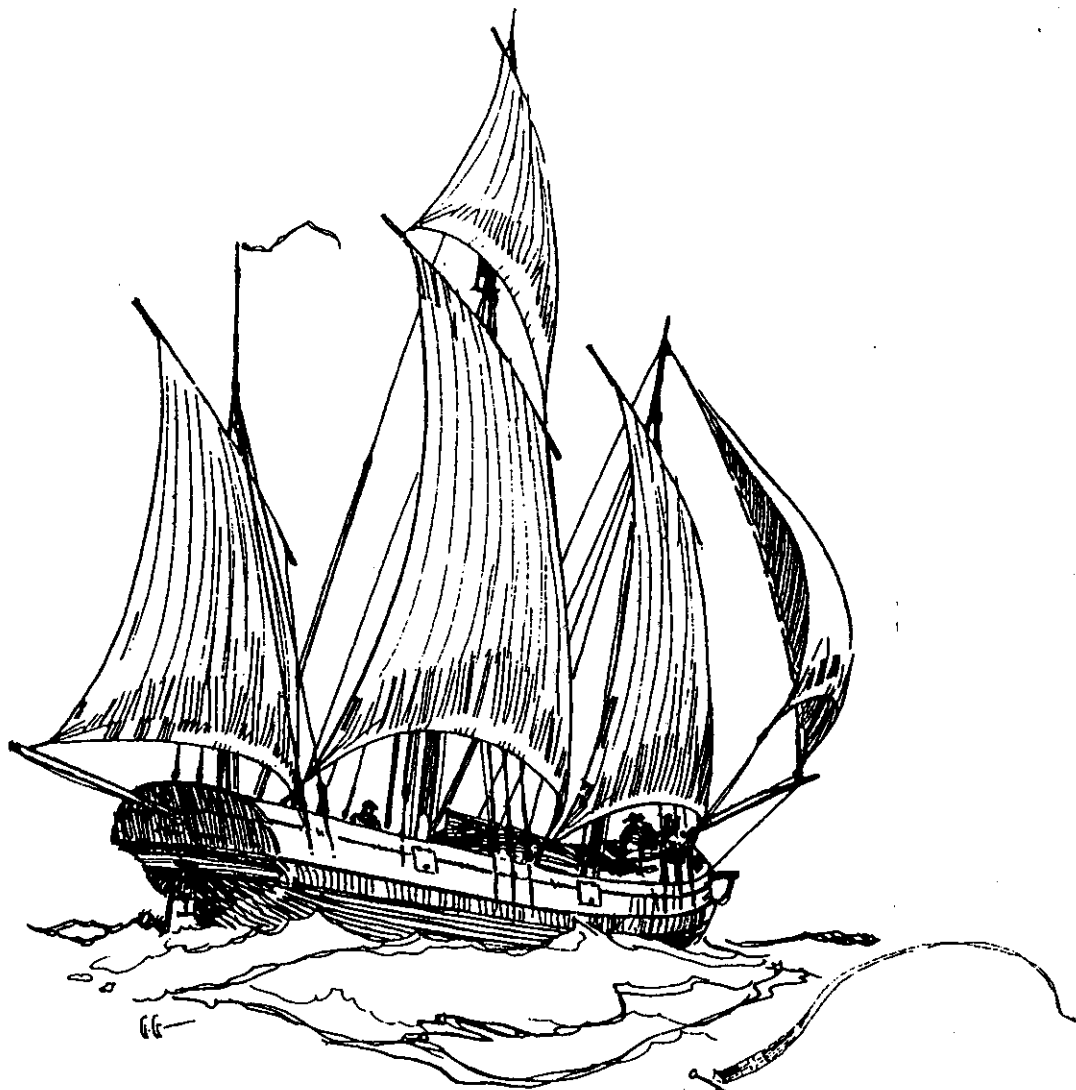
In the days when wind in the canvas proved to be a real and steady need in tight spots, the lugger's sail make-up would have been most attractive to Laffite, not only for smuggling purposes in the bayous of Louisiana, but perhaps also for "booty" runs on and to Galveston Isle's West End.

Using Lyle Saxon as a solid source for any near description of Laffite's vessels is not altogether a researcher's classic "ace in the hole," but, as is the case with all information of varying degrees of historical accuracy, it might be the best one has with which to work. In his chapter describing the raid of the United States forces on Barataria, prior to the Battle of New Orleans, Saxon mentions that many vessels were captured intact, including "feluccas."

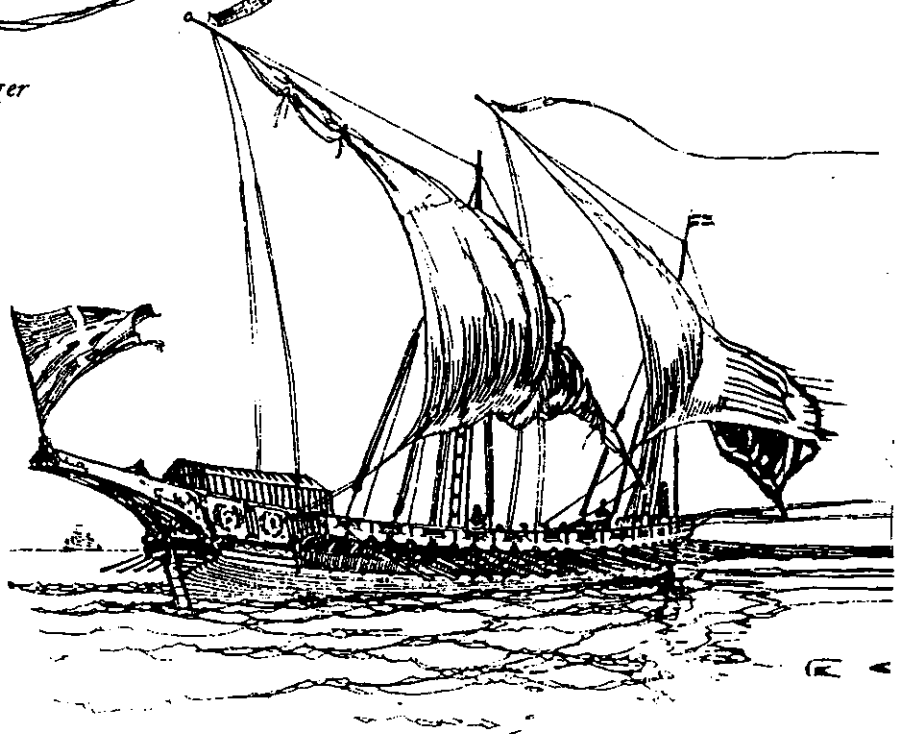
Laffite's feluccas more than likely differed somewhat from that in the accompanying illustration, which has heavy Mediterranean influence. The "Bos" may have used a smaller version, with fewer or no oars. But the triangular sails (or "lateen") would have been employed. Once again, though, being able to fall back upon an emergency power source, such as oars, would have proven attractive in tight spots during pursuit.

And then it occurs that, as though good, solid information on Laffite is not hard enough to find, just the locating of a mere, clear description of a vessel that he may have used becomes even more maddeningly difficult.

I am referring here to the "brigantine" - also known as a "brig" (not to be confused with an on-board detention center) and as a "hermaphrodite." Just a slight re-rigging of sail changes the name - or a combination of the



*The Lugger*



*The Felucca*

names changes the sail (see the accompanying illustration).

All of which is not too surprising to this writer, who found that while working the sea, plenty of old-timers with too much time (either on their hands or their heads) would thoroughly enjoy splitting hairs over some inane matter, issue, or procedure, until that which was very clear became very, very unclear.

"Polacres" (see the accompanying illustration) and "corvettes" also appear in the illusive picture of Laffite's fleet.

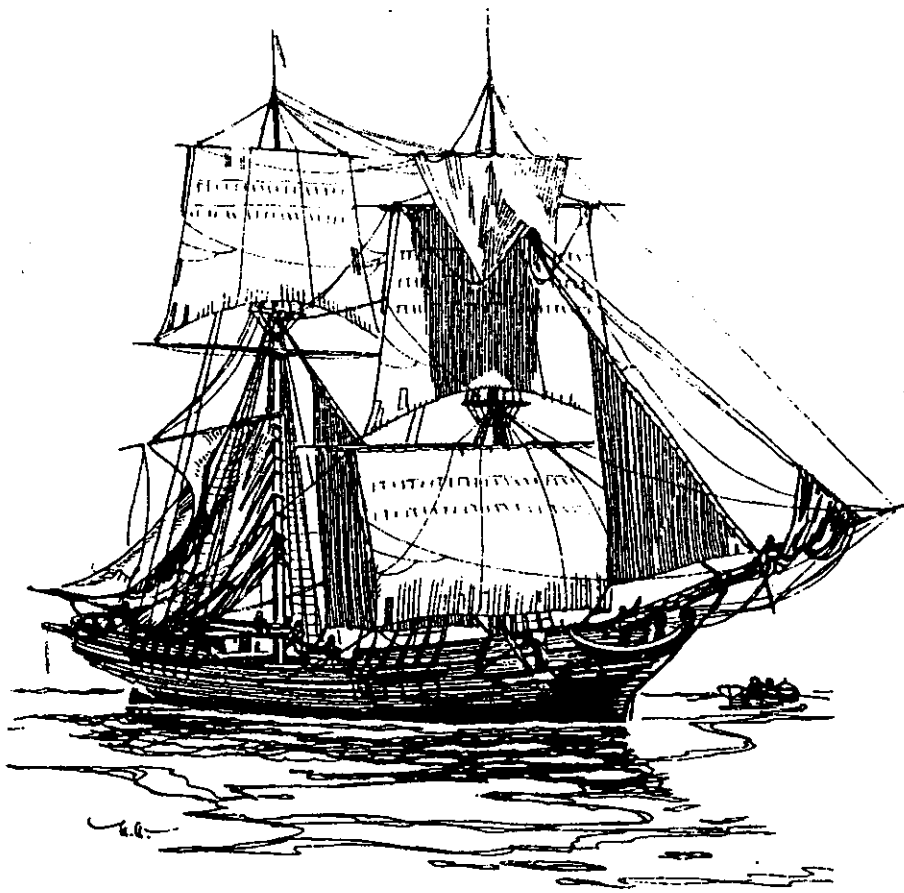
One thing is so close to being certain that it might not need to even be introduced. The many-tiered, first-rate, ship-of-the-line – the huge floating fortress that was capable of releasing a broadside flying wall of cannonballs – this Laffite did not have. There may have been times he wanted such a vessel (if only to harass

his enemies all the more), but Laffite seemed to live by the same creed as Marion "The Swamp Fox" Fox - namely, "He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day."

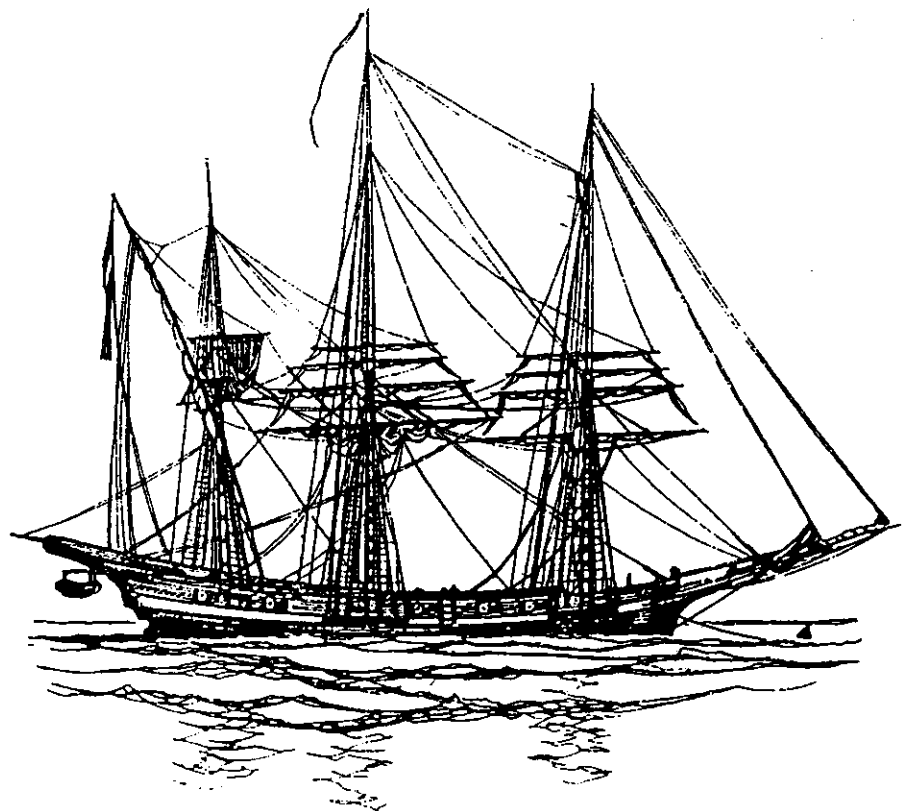
This writer encourages any persons who feel they might have something to offer on the mystery of Jean Laffite's vessels to "give it a shot."

#### Note

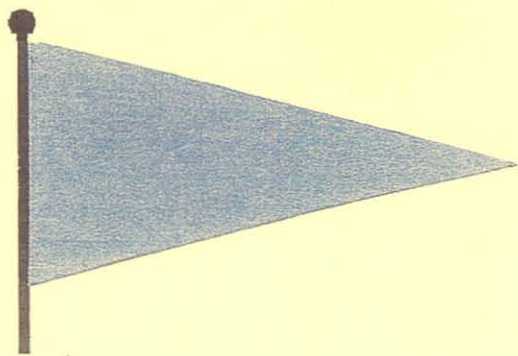
The accompanying illustrations were reproduced from *The Book of Old Ships* by Henry Brundage Culver (Mineola, NY: "The Dover Pictorial Archive Series," Dover Publications, Inc.: 1992). This work was originally published in 1924 by Doubleday, Page and Company under the title, *The Book of Old Ships: And Something of Their Evolution and Romance/Wherein will be found drawings and descriptions of many varieties of vessels, both long and round, showing their development from most remote times..., etc.*



*The Brigantine*



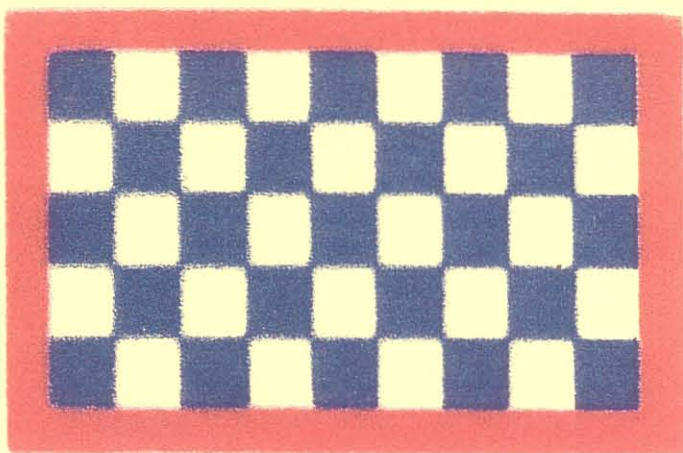
*The Polacre*



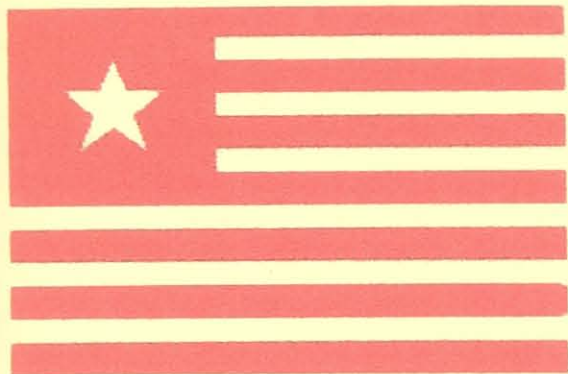
Jean Laffite's Personal Pennant



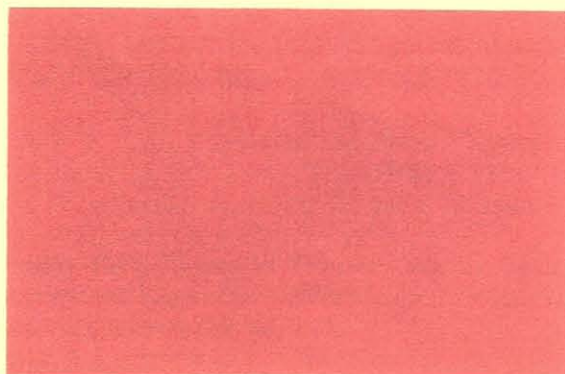
Cartagenian Republic



Mexican Republic



James Long's Flag  
of Independence



Corsairs Boarding  
Signal Flag



## FLAGS FLOWN AT GALVESTON BY THE CORSAIRS AND FILIBUSTERS

JEAN L. EPPERSON

Galveston Island from 1816 through 1820 was inhabited by freebooters and filibusters who flew different flags. Luis Aury and Jean Laffite, the two principal corsair chieftains on the island, sailed under letters of marque from Cartagena and Mexico and flew their respective flags. Intent on freeing Mexico from Spain, filibuster Xavier Mina would have raised the Mexican Republican flag. James Long, hoping to carve out a private kingdom, had designed his own flag, the first lone star banner to fly over Texas.

One modern chronicler wrote, "In the old days vessels at sea did not fly their national flags, which were reserved for special events or for battle. When two strange ships met at sea, and after examining one another and deciding at last to fight, the flags went up as the first broadside boomed, not before. It would have been considered the height of rashness for a master to show a stranger at sea who he was before they were within speaking-trumpet distance. It was the custom to carry on board ship the flags or colors of several nations. For example, any master sailing in waters controlled by the Spanish, and thinking an approaching vessel Spanish, would run up the Spanish flag. If the ship was hailed in Spanish someone on board who spoke the tongue would answer."<sup>1</sup> When the red banner was raised by a corsair it signaled that the other ship was to be boarded. Grappling irons appeared and if the targeted vessel was obviously out-manned it surrendered then and there.

New Granada, a loose federation of Spanish provinces, declared its independence in 1810.<sup>2</sup> Cartagena, a province of the Granadine viceroyalty, declared her independence as a republic on November 11, 1811, and designed a flag of three concentric oblongs of red, yellow, and green with an eight-point white star on the green center field. New Granada adopted this flag on April 26, 1814, as her naval emblem.<sup>3</sup> This was the flag which flew on the privateering fleets of Aury and Laffite. Writing to Governor W.C.C. Claiborne in 1814, Jean Laffite stated, "I have never sailed under any flag but that of the Republic of Carthage[n]a [sic]."<sup>4</sup> Did Laffite fly a blue pennant as his personal emblem as well?

One latter-day writer says he did.<sup>5</sup>

One of the first flags of the new Mexican Republic was a blue and white checkered flag bordered in red created in about 1815.<sup>6</sup> This was the flag flown on Galveston Island by Aury, Laffite, and Mina when they represented the Republic of Mexico.

Filibuster James Long designed his own flag of independence. It sported thirteen stripes of red and white and, in the upper left hand corner, a red square centered with a white star. It was made of silk bordered with a red fringe by Mrs. Jane Long and her sister, Mrs. Chesley Miller, in Mississippi.<sup>7</sup>

In a letter dated July 7, 1819, Jean Laffite wrote to James Long, "They tell me, sir, that you have hoisted a flag. I please myself in believing, sir, that it is the same one which already exists, for it would be inconvenient to take another than the one for which we have been fighting for eight years; that would show a sort of inconsistency, indecision, and instability which would only produce a bad effect. Furthermore, our flag is recognized at Buenos Aires and Venezuela, and our corsairs who carry it are received as friends by the authorities of those two provinces. Such is sufficient reason for keeping the colors."<sup>8</sup> Of course, Laffite was referring to the Cartagena flag and his letter had no apparent effect on Long's decision to fly his own flag.

Thus three flags, Cartagena's, Mexico's, and Long's, and not the official Spanish banner, flew over Galveston from 1816 through 1820.

<sup>1</sup> Robert E. Lee, *Blackbeard the Pirate* (Winston-Salem, North Carolina: John F. Blair, 1990), p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> *The Encyclopedia Americana* (Chicago: Americana Corp., 1953), vol. VII, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Faye, "Types of Privateer Vessels, Their Armament and Flags in the Gulf of Mexico," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* (January 1940), p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Major A. Lacarriere Latour, *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida reprint, 1964), vol. XIII, Appendix. "Carthage[n]a" is the French spelling of that city.

<sup>5</sup> J.O. Dyer: "Some Sidelights on Buccaneering" (*Galveston Daily News*, April 30, 1920); "Laffite a Schemer as Well as an Executive" (*Galveston Daily*

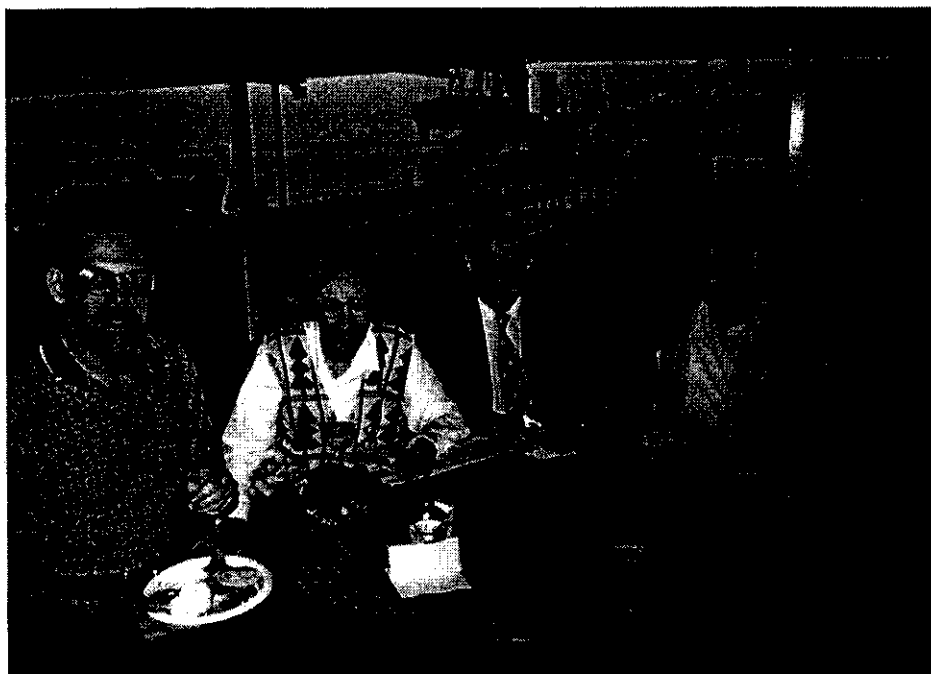
News, May 14, 1922).

<sup>6</sup> Whitney Smith, *Flags Through the Ages and Across the World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> Mamie Wynne Cox, *The Romantic Flags of Texas*

(Dallas: Banks Upshaw & Co., 1936), pp. 135-141.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Jean Laffite to James Long, July 7, 1819, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.



Laffite Society members enjoy hors d'oeuvres and drinks aboard the River Barge during its stop at Galveston on the maiden voyage of an itinerary retracing the marine meanderings of Jean Laffite

LETTERS FROM THE NATIONAL ARCHIVE OF CUBA  
TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY DOROTHY MCD. KARILANOVIC  
[Not to be Quoted Without Permission]

The following letters of Pierre and Jean Laffite were provided by Robert C. Vogel, Laffite researcher and author. Mr. Vogel considers this correspondence of special note, especially the letters of August 16, 1817, and September 1, 1817. He makes the following comments in correspondence dated July 12, 1998:

... the Cuban material is more comprehensive than the documents filed in the Archivo de Indias in Seville; it is ... closer to the original sources of the correspondence and reports (the Spanish consuls in New Orleans, the captain-generals in Havana, and the officials in Mexico) and contains some material that was never copied into other archives ... the translations of Spanish documents made by Stanley Faye and Harris Gaylord Warren were not based on original manuscripts, but on transcriptions of selected *legajos* in the Archivo de Indias ...

1. Translation of letter signed "No. 13," New Orleans, Louisiana, dated September 1, 1817. Printed document [letter 115, *legajo* 492, number 18,688] from a text of publications from the National Archive of Cuba LIII, titled *Documentos Para la Historia de México*, compiled and arranged by José L. Franco, Havana, Cuba, 1961, pp. 138-141.

= General. = Since the beginning of our operations favorable occasions have presented themselves that, individually, might have accomplished our project if there had not been a slowness and negligence that discouraged and even caused every other person to give up. How did we not sense having allowed this so favorable opportunity to escape when Mina left for *Sotto la Marina* [italics as given]? What is necessary to resist his operation? A brigantine of war might have been enough to dissolve it, seeing the small number of men that he had, and his convoy composed only of a schooner armed with five cannons and manned by Aury, which, after disembarking, had stayed a long time on the coast for the purpose of looking for the port of Matagorda, not having more than twenty-five men; with what ease might we have been able to take it. The truth is that if these circumstances had been taken advantage of, the operation might have been terminated, with very little expense. = In reality, things take another aspect, and obligate us to say that it is perhaps a bad thing for the good. His Excellency knows without doubt that Aury, on leaving Matagorda, has given orders to his men to reunite in *Galveston* [italics as given], to receive new instructions there: We have followed step by step these movements and operations of which we were instructed by a loyal agent, who has assured us that it was definitely resolved to take possession of the port of *Amalia* [italics as given]: As soon as we knew this resolution, we set among those people the fire of discord. As a result of this measure, a great part of them have left the service, and he [Aury] has been forced to leave with more haste than he might have desired, fearing complete desertion. = We have believed it very urgent to re-establish that plan [? - word abbreviated as *pato* [sic]]; in which our great project must be accomplished, with success assured to His Excellency, in such a way that nothing remains to be desired. = We are going then to put ourselves at the head of the said enterprise that will be of great use to us, supposing that we gain the confidence of the privateer captains of the Corsairs of this city, as well as also any other American captains who engage in privateering under the flag of Buenos-Ayres, those that are important to us in establishing the position cited, saying that it is the most useful for the Corsairs and promising aid and protection. = There ought not to be any doubt, then, that at the beginning of Spring, we will be at a respectable point if others follow us, and that His Excellency is aware [does not ignore] that in order to put it in that state, some funds are necessary without which nothing can be proven true; and that the great services that will be of use to the King will have the result that His Majesty does not have to feel the expenditure. = We have summoned some men for the port service, a part of whom were ours in the period in which the English wanted to take possession of Louisiana, a period that, without flattering ourselves, brings us honor, by virtue of our conduct and repulses of the brilliant propositions that they made to us to help them in the conquest. As we believe that Your Excellency has had knowledge of this deed, and if we take the liberty of recalling it, it is in order to assure you that there is no one in the world that can make us break our word; also we assure you that time will prove to Your Excellency what we have the honor of promising you. = Having just finished dispatching a schooner named *Carmelita* under command of 20 tons, loaded with provisions and other useful effects for re-establishment of the port, that we

have presented to the Messrs. ... [sic], we have purchased a brigantine which will be of great use to us for the commerce mentioned. = When these gentlemen have read the general state of the cargo and see its importance, thus also that of the two ships, we will note immediately that the funds that have been administered to us, have not been enough even to pay for half of the costs for the expedition and consignment of goods, far from it. Fortunately in the interval of time in which we loaded the schooner, a sum of thirteen thousand *pesos* that came from our small corsair that was taken from the contrabandists (as we had agreed and were authorized by Your Excellency to outfit), half of the sum belonging to us as *Oro*. [[sic] word abbreviated - "gold" ?], has been designated since then to pay a part of the cargo and in regard to the other [part] we have made some contracts of payment for a term of 60 days. We hope that His Excellency will have been informed of these things done and that we may use our people, resources, and credit for the cause, with such certainty that *you will come* [italics as given] to our aid, facilitating funds to meet the costs that the project requires, and to satisfy our pledges of payment on which we depend in a great way, for the purpose of not obscuring our idea, which in this moment has been of the highest usefulness. = A man respected for his customs, talents and merit, renowned first because he might be able to guide the operation of the conquest of Mexico has refused to join with Don *Bernardo Gutiérrez* [italics as given], Aury and lastly Mina, and has accepted our group, as legitimate, and for love of the cause. = There is no doubt that if he had at his disposition monetary funds, in accordance with ours, we might be able to execute the most beautiful political and military operation that has been conceived until now, since discovery of the Antilles. I leave to His Excellency's judgment the idea you may have of the talents of this man, in view of his plans and design that he had the honor of presenting to you. = A great number of officials of distinction are in New Orleans, they await the means of communicating with Mina. If those men join with each other, they would be for us a danger because of their military talents and because of the forces they would form. It is of much urgency to demolish their project, to have two small, swift sailing ships to cruise on the coasts of Mexico, [so] that they can inform us of Mina's operations, impede him and advise Your Excellency of the result. = When we see ourselves in a position to give this great stroke, we will have the ability to deliver to Your Excellency those great men of the Revolution if you judge it necessary, as Cortes, Gautier, Humbert, Campomanes, Mina's Secretary and the others will march to our orders, inflaming them with the cause of liberty and relieving them over all, of the burden of debts. = Also it would be of great use if Your Excellency could send me your fleet, to prevent Aury from taking possession of the port of Amalia, or to expel him in case he finds himself there; there is no doubt that they will return to Galveston when he knows his plans, and we will have to be careful about informing the Corsairs that are at sea if it is possible for us for the purpose of, as soon as weaving our web, the effect will exceed our greatest hopes, and that for a long time no one will hear of the Corsairs of Mexico and chiefs of the Revolution; and we have the honor of indicating to Your Excellency, that if we deliver to you those men it is with the condition that no blood be spilled, without which nothing would be possible, and no one in the world would be able to bring us to serve the cause of kings, endangering victims. What overwhelms us in worry: = We beg His Excellency to send us some funds to speed on our work, which we would like to see ended, and to prove to you that our promises are not illusions; and to remove ourselves from the vengeance of those men before, without doubt, sooner or later, the project is discovered: leaving to His Excellency's consideration what they would do to us if we were to find ourselves in their power. We have only praises to make to Your Excellency for the friends who until now have helped us with all their resources, and who would desire us to have disposable funds to put into execution all the circumstances that present themselves, which are not very favorable for bringing to an end our project. = If it is not agreeable to Your Excellency to re-establish the port, it would be necessary for you to have the courtesy of informing us of it, since then we would take our own measures in the event that all the corsairs and prizes that are met with at that time fall into their power, and we presume that there will be twenty at least. = Although this explanation that we present to Your Excellency is somewhat vague we can assure you that it is not confined just to the substance of events that have taken place since the time of Mina's expedition until this date, because if it were necessary to show an association of all the small particulars and circumstances that have happened relative to the project, a ream of paper would scarcely be enough to confirm it. = We await instructions from Your Excellency, and we implore you to believe in our high regard and to receive the respects of your very humble and obedient servants. = No. 13. = New Orleans 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1817. (115)

Dear Brother - The moment you receive this, send me a ship with provisions, and it will be better if you can come, because my health is changed. You might finish up also better than I our business matters with Captain Champlin, since speaking his language you will understand him, which I cannot do without help from an interpreter. = Up to the present, I have had all the success I have been able to wish for concerning our undertaking, which I promise you not to abandon until I finish it perfectly, which occupies me by preference to the purchase of Negroes, although in that there are some doubloons to be earned; but I have given my word and I will keep my obligation even though I might lose my life. = This is the state of the matter: Mr. Aury having resolved definitively to give assistance to the Port of Amalia, I immediately asked to speak with General Sarracin<sup>1</sup> with whom I have a connection, and as he is a person of substance and influence and has a party of soldiers at his service, having come to look for me, I obtained his obligation to remain with me, and I made him some proposals, on which, after having reflected, he responded to me that he would accept if he could have some provisions to maintain his people, to which I promised to give him some, and on the following day he encamped with his party near me. = I have succeeded in separating from Mr. Aury's service fifteen sailors, to whom I have given passage in the brigantine [Bergantine]; fourteen colored youths are with me of those of Colonel Savar<sup>2</sup>, in whom Mr. Aury has much confidence; he has given me his, and he makes that trip with the second [officer] of his corsair named Clark and Mr. Crétien, Captain of the prize; in a word I might have been able to succeed in separating all of his people if I had had enough provisions. Mr. Aury saw himself obligated to leave for fear of complete desertion and as he was seeing his forces diminishing each day, he was determined to set sail. = Meanwhile, I am like the Chief and father of Galveston, I say "father" because all of those I have obligated to remain with me are without provisions, and as a consequence it is necessary that I maintain them, until I encounter a means of removing myself from them, which will not be difficult for me. = You can meet with the friends and *say to them and assure them that I can do everything and make use of the place because I am considered as the Chief, and nothing is done without my advice* [italics as given].<sup>3</sup> = To God [Adiós] = The number of ships that are here are = A schooner [goleta] prize of Beluche; another American one to the consignment of Mr. Champlin; an American sloop [Balandra] outside the bar; a packet-boat [frigate] prize of Beluche, the Corsair [privateer] the *Independence*, Captain Bautista, privateer of Mr. Aury.<sup>4</sup> = The sloop laden with wine is going to leave for Charleston, and the rest also. = I hope you will try to come if you are recovered, since I am beginning to run out of everything, to which I am not accustomed. I am thinking that you will charge me as imprudent for sending the brigantine for appraisal<sup>5</sup>, but I have not been able to do anything else, needing to write you to send me provisions and in order to send Iturribarría and those that I had promised passage and for all of whom I had my expenses. All this has made me make that sacrifice; finally, come what may, I am very content to have succeeded in separating a great part of Aury's people and putting into disarray the rest. = You will make a good provision of water, since the one here is bad and unhealthy and you will bring me Flowers of Sulphur since I find I have the itch [scabies?], which together with all that is bad leaves me with little aptitude. = I urge you to meet with the friends, telling them and assuring them that if they want to make themselves owners of the place, I promise them to do it, or if they want to abandon it; in a word, I flatter myself I can dispose of it as they wish; I await with impatience a reply. = A copy (111) [sic]

1. In the translation given in Stanley Faye's "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3, July, 1940, p. 774, this name is written as "Sarrazin."
2. In Stanley Faye's "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3, July, 1940, page 774, this name is written as "Savary."
3. Italics might not have appeared in original letter, according to Stanley Faye in "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3, July, 1940, page 774.
4. In the translation of this same letter in Stanley Faye's "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3, July, 1940, page 774, the name given here is "Joly" rather than "Aury."
5. In Stanley Faye's "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3, July, 1940, page 775, the translation is given as "because she will be inspected by the customhouse."

3. Translation of letter dated New Orleans, February 26, 1817; signed "Per. Laffite = Jn. Laffite." Printed document [letter 83, legajo 492, No. 18,688] from a text of publications from the National Archive of Cuba LIII, entitled *Documentos Para la Historia de México*, compiled and arranged by José L. Franco, Havana, Cuba, 1961, p.89.

New Orleans, 26 of February, 1817 = General = We have the honor of sending into Your Excellency's presence A. Latour who will be the one who delivers to you this letter, who is invested with all our confidence and who is authorized to give to Your Excellency any explanation you could wish on matters of interest relating to our Government. It is useless to enter into details that would only be given imperfectly in a letter. Your Excellency, you will know them [the interesting matters] from Mr. Latour's own mouth, who will satisfy you fully on this particular. = You will find him instructed in all our secrets and consequently, Your Excellency, you can ask him questions on such and receive from him the solution you might want on important matters of which Father Antonio has informed you. We have charged Mr. Latour to suggest to you the plan that is quick and infallible in reaching the desired end, that of putting to an end the harm that has been done already, as well as to prevent greater harm that is in the making. = Your Excellency can be persuaded, the measures we have proposed through Mr. Latour are the result of a long and profound reflection, in such a manner that we have perfect knowledge of the locality and of the individuals. If the least doubt remains in the mind of Your Excellency, you will be obliged to remind yourself that for some time we have with anticipation been given information on various incidents that have happened, precisely such as we had announced. = The distance is consequently the difficulty, and danger in corresponding with Your Excellency, time passing, the indispensable mystery that must surround this matter, the scarcity of means adopted, our own security, and consequently the importance of the matter: all require that Your Excellency send a qualified person who possesses your complete trust and who is sufficiently authorized to observe and manage what the importance of the objective in question requires. = We have the honor of having the deepest respect for Your Excellency. = signed = Per. Laffite = Jn. Laffite.<sup>1</sup> = (83)

1. See translation of same letter on p. 765 of "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite" by Stanley Faye, *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3, July, 1940, pp. 733-826. According to Faye, a note attached to the Spanish translation of the letter by Fray Antonio de Sedella shows that the French original forwarded from New Orleans was signed with the symbols "No, 13" and "No, 13-bis."

4. August 16, 1817 letter to Jean Laffite from Pierre Laffite. Printed document [Letter 114, *legajo* 492, No. 18,688] from a text of publications from the National Archive of Cuba, LIII, entitled, *Documentos Para la Historia de México*, compiled and arranged by José L. Franco, Havana, Cuba, 1961, pp. 137-138.

No. 7 = Translation = Galveston, 16th of August, 1817 = It has been twenty-four days since Bautista left. I believed that this time period might have been sufficient to send me the provisions that I have requested and which my position requires, of which I believe you probably will have been informed, and to come and relieve me of my post, since I need to go to the City to recover myself and to cure myself of the itch which is of much inconvenience to me. Seeing that my provisions were exhausted, I had to make a buy-up [of goods], they made me pay plenty, but they [provisions] were indispensable at any price. I made a good deal since the arrival of four ships will make them [the provisions] go up, even though they are now at an exorbitant price. Of these four ships two have been taken by Mr. Champlin's Corsair. One by superior order [?], and the other by the Corsair *El Bien Amado*, with a cargo of Tobacco from Havana, its captain, José Sandant, which has taken a man of distinction [an important person] who was going to Lima as Governor. The latter offered him ten thousand pesos solely to let him disembark anywhere with his papers. He [Sandant] told me that he might have done this without the misfortune of having encountered Aury, having informed him of his prize, who took him [the important person] from him by force, saying that he [the important person] would serve as an exchange for prisoners they find in Havana. His papers have been sold here, and the cross of Carlos III, with which [he] is decorated. All I have acquired. Also, his wearing apparel. The courier of this will deliver to you his titles and papers and also the cross. I have made a bill of exchange for 580 pesos to the order of Mr. Festar, payable at once in ten days. The great service that he has done me with this advance makes me plead that you will satisfy this debt. I fear that the arrival of these boats will put us all in poverty. If you can, come quickly to help me. I will see myself compelled to abandon the Port. Persuade our friends of my respects, and tell them that I have concerned myself with matters in such a way as to satisfy all of them. I cannot say more. A Brigantine loaded with wine, the prize of the Corsair *El Feliz*, was lost on the bar. A thousand things to the brother-in-law and to Bautista, I am impatiently awaiting the provisions. = Your brother = P.L. = A copy = a rubric

## CONTEMPORANEOUS DESCRIPTIONS OF JEAN LAFFITE

JOHN HOWELLS

This article documents descriptions of Jean Laffite by the privateer's contemporaries. These descriptions may thus be as authoritative as any of those which have been passed down through the years.

1. The Galveston City Directory, 1857, "Early History of Galveston," p. 61. Colonel W.D.C. Hall had been an associate of early Texas filibusters Colonel Henry Perry and General James Long. Colonel Hall was still a resident of Galveston in 1857 and related his meeting with Laffite at the Maison Rouge in January 1820.

"Colonel Hall found him one of the most prepossessing men he had ever met with, both in personal appearance and address. Laffite was six feet and two inches high, and his figure one of remarkable symmetry, with feet and hands so small, compared with his large stature, as to attract attention.

In his deportment he was remarkably bland, dignified and social towards equals, though reserved and silent towards inferiors or those under his command. He received visitors with an easy air of welcome and profuse hospitality.

He wore no uniform, but dressed fashionably, and was remarkably neat in his personal appearance. On board of his vessel he usually wore a loose coat with nothing to distinguish him from his subordinates.

He spoke English correctly, but with a marked French accent that at once indicated his nativity, though it perhaps imparted additional interest to his conversation. He possessed superior conversational powers, and entertained his guests with the rehearsal of many original and amusing anecdotes. He had a remarkable habit of closing one eye while in conversation, and keeping it closed so much, that many who had but a slight acquaintance with him were firmly impressed with the belief that he had the use of but one eye."

At the time Colonel Hall first became

acquainted with him, Laffite was preparing to leave Galveston in accordance with an order brought by Commodore Patterson, directing Laffite to abandon the island and destroy the town.

2. The Historic New Orleans Collection, Port of New Orleans Register No. 3, dated 1813, for the brig *Goelette la Diligente*: armed with ten cannon. Captain listed as Jean Laffite, age 32, place of birth Bordeaux. Also listed as crew members were Pierre Laffite, Jean B. Latour and John LaPorte.

3. The Esau Glasscock Diary, November 1809 (Lyle Saxon's reference material).

"Jean Laffite – tall, pale skin, large dark eyes. Clean shaven except for beard extending part-way down his cheeks. Narrow feet, elegantly shod – 29 years old. Six feet tall, slender and well built. Sleek black hair, profile classic. Seldom smiled, but when did, sparkling eyes. Usually clean-shaven but sometimes allowed beard to grow along his cheeks and affected sideburns. Grace of manner and quick wit. Great personal charm; droll habit of closing left eye while talking. Both Pierre and Jean spoke English with French accent."

4. Proclamation by William C. C. Claiborne, Governor of Louisiana, on November 24, 1813, of a \$500 reward for John Lafitte for "grievously wounding" one of the assistants of Revenue Officer Walker Gilbert by firing upon him while seizing contraband goods in open day.

"John Laffite is about five feet ten inches high; stout made; about thirty-six years of age, slightly pitted with the small pox; has brown hair and black eyes. He has a little impediment in his speech; is a Frenchman by birth, but speaks tolerably good English."

5. Cruise of the *Enterprise*, in "A Day with

Laffite," U.S. Magazine and Democratic Review,  
July 1839.

Jean Laffite is described by an officer of the U.S.S. *Enterprise* in 1819 as "a stout, rather gentlemanly personage, five feet ten inches in height, dressed very simply in a foraging cap and blue frock of a most villainous fit; his

complexion, like most Creoles, olive; his countenance full, mild, and rather impressive, but for a small black eye which, now and then, as he grew animated in conversation, would flash in a way which impressed me with a notion that 'El Capitano' might be, when aroused, a very 'ugly customer.' He was evidently educated and gifted with no small talent for conversation."



Laffite Society members enjoy one of the Society's trips to Grand Isle and Grande Terre, Louisiana, site of Laffite's "Barataria"



## LAFFITE GRAVE SITE FOUND

*Pam Keyes*

The search for Jean Laffite's gravesite reminds me of the hunt for the source of a will-o'-the-wisp anomaly in my own backyard, the "Spooklight." Like Laffite's gravesite, this Spooklight's flickering glimmer, seen late at night on a country road near the Oklahoma-Missouri border, has been teasing people for years to find the truth behind it.

Well, the Spooklight's spark is still a mystery, but Laffite's gravesite is not, at least in my opinion.

It is my belief that Jean Laffite is buried in an unmarked grave within a ten-foot radius of a large oak-tree stump on a small hill in the Fosterburg Cemetery, about six and one-half miles northeast of Alton, Illinois. Is there physical proof of this? No. Is there documentary proof? Only the word of his grandson, John A. Laffite, recounting a 1922 visit to the location with Jean's son, Jules, then eighty-eight years of age.

Think about it. Only a few years after Jean was supposedly buried in the Yucatan, the explorer John Stephens was unable to locate the gravesite there. Stephens found that the story of the Yucatan burial of Laffite was substantiated only by the locals via word of mouth. That is how legends are born, my friends.

Modern-day "explorers" seeking to plumb the Yucatan coast for the gravesite are told it was washed out to sea by a hurricane in this century. How convenient! But that does not explain why Stephens could not find it just fifteen years after the supposed "burial."

I always figured that Jean Laffite was buried in a country cemetery near Alton, but the question of which cemetery posed a problem. I had visited Alton once before, a few years ago, but was limited in time and had no opportunity to research possible locations.

A history professor in Alton tried for years to find the cemetery holding the privateer's grave. The Fosterburg cemetery eluded him, but he was missing a crucial piece of the puzzle: John A. Laffite's memory of the 1922 visit.

The Fosterburg cemetery is in the right location, six miles northeast of Alton, walking in a straight line from the train station there; it is

located across the street from the Frank Culp farmhouse. A very large barn had stood nearby, north of the house, according to information gathered from current residents by Paul Gardiner of Edwardsville, Illinois.

Today, there is no cast iron fence anywhere in the cemetery, and caretakers do not remember the existence of anything like that. In 1922, John A. Laffite said that the fence was already quite corroded and falling to pieces, and that a large tree had uprooted part of it. In the whole Fosterburg cemetery, there is only one tree which can today fit this description. This tree is located in the northwestern area of the oldest portion of the cemetery, and it has been cut down (and recently - in October of 1998, I could still see sawdust on the stump). This tree's stump has over 150 rings on it.

There is a concrete outline surrounding the area near the stump, and the roots have heaved this up a bit. An 1870 grave marker for a German woman lies extremely close to the south side of the stump.

Although I did not take soil samples to check for iron residue from the fence posts, I am positive such samples taken near the stump would show such a presence, thereby proving that a fence *had* been there, long ago. Probably not long after Jules and John A. Laffite's visit in 1922, the fence was removed and its disintegrating parts summarily pitched into the small ravine on the western edge of the burial ground.

John A. Laffite said that during his visit the cemetery was overgrown with weeds and suffered from neglect. That is certainly not the case now; the whole cemetery is carefully maintained to the extent that the slightly spongy, loess-like ground has some time in the past ten years received a fresh layer of topsoil to control erosion and keep most of the old, weather-beaten, heavy marble markers from tumbling forward onto their faces. The grass is carefully trimmed to make the place almost park-like in appearance. Indeed, the prettiest area of the Fosterburg cemetery is at the crest of the little hill in the old part, where I believe Laffite is buried, surrounded by the remains of the predominantly German

settlers of the area. Apparently the old residents coveted burial plots on this little hill highly, as the gravestones here - so wind-whipped that it is almost impossible to read the dates on them - are very close together.

The weather was sunny during my morning visit to the Fosterburg Cemetery, but a brisk shower soon swept in as my husband and I headed back to Alton for a brief tour of the city's shops and casino before leaving for St. Louis to spend the night.

At St. Louis, we found a striking irony: a restaurant named "Jean Laffite's," sitting beneath the Martin Luther King, Jr., Bridge, right next door to the old stone warehouse where Manuel Lisa once sold his goods on the Mississippi River. This restaurant is located in the newly revamped Laclede's Landing area of St. Louis, and the irony lies in the fact that it is only about one-half mile from the site where Jean Laffite purportedly lived, according to information in *The Journal of Jean Laffite*.

The restaurant manager said that he was ignorant of any connection Laffite had to St. Louis; the restaurant had been named after him to give a New Orleans flair to the dining spot! And what a restaurant it is, with a brick-and-stone atmospheric interior, gargantuan antique walnut back bar, equally palatial chandeliers, and pier mirrors. The food was excellent; we had the shrimp Creole and baby back ribs.

The next day, we toured the antique district of Cherokee Street, an antebellum neighborhood of cobblestone streets in the heart of Saint Louis, full of stately old brick townhouses that surely must have been there in Laffite's time.

In summary, there is a lot in Saint Louis and Alton still to be discovered regarding both Jean and Pierre Laffite. For example, Jean's son, Jules Laffite, is supposed to be buried somewhere in Saint Louis, and the mysterious Wesleyan

burial place of Pierre has not yet been found, so additional issues in this locale remain to be researched. I am fairly well convinced that the area of Jean's gravesite has been located at long last. However, as long as controversy remains regarding the validity of the Laffite journal collection, even the discovery of the gravesite will likely be contested.

I am sure that there were valid reasons for which both Laffites faked their deaths in the Yucatan in the 1820's. For example, in his biography of Andrew Jackson, written in the 1850's, Alexander Walker, a contemporary, wrote the following about Jean Laffite:

Let the truth now be told! Time scatters the mist of prejudice and passion, and patient inquiry dissipates the gaudy and ingenious web of poetry and romance. In truthful history Jean Lafitte [sic] must ever occupy a conspicuous position among the gallant spirits of 1814 and 1815, for the brilliancy and efficiency of the services which he rendered his adopted country, whose authorities destroyed his fortune, blasted his prospects, and handed his name down to posterity as that of a blood-thirsty corsair and outlaw, the hero of numerous fictions, written to inflame youthful imaginations and satisfy a morbid appetite for scenes of blood, of murder, of reckless daring, and lawless outrage. A name which he had, by such honorable self-abnegation, hoped to redeem from all dishonor, and connect with conspicuous and patriotic services, became the favorite *nom de guerre* of every desperate adventurer and roving corsair of the Gulf.

## THE SHIPS' OFFICERS

### (PART IV)

WIL ZAPALAC

[Editor's Note: this article is part of a continuing series authored by present-day seaman and Laffite Society member Wil Zapalac, installments of which have appeared in several previous issues of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. Wil points out, "Readers should be informed that this offering on the subject of Jean Laffite's officers is, as with my other articles, a mixture of fact, conjecture, and maritime humor." The main thread of the series is the comparison of modern-day boatmen with those of Laffite's time.]

The bewitching stealth of Jean Laffite is quite legendary. In books and movies, he is forever suddenly and mysteriously appearing from behind moss-laden trees, through curtains, etc. Perhaps this is just accepted as natural with the French/Cajun/Creole bayou dwellers.

One captain with whom I sailed on cargo runs in the Caribbean had such a talent - an amazing ability to blend in with the scenery, and completely unintentionally.

I recall one windy, summer day when the vessel was docked, waiting on the stevedores to load the barge with containers. Something had come up in the wheelhouse, and I was ringing around the various decks and departments of the vessel, trying to locate "le capitain." Getting nothing but a crabby remark from the cook, I began to search the exterior decks. Still coming up empty-handed, I returned to the cool comfort of the wheelhouse and began to scour the docks with the glasses.

"Where the !@#\$% is he?" I remember muttering.

Growing impatient, I rang up a seaman and sent him scampering onto the dock to find the captain.

As I watched the young kid go loping down the gangplank and about the dock, I suddenly spied the captain, serenely sitting on a crate, completely oblivious to the world. The very same crate over which I had just passed my binoculars only a moment before.

"Well, this won't take long," I thought as the seaman began to walk up to the captain - and then right past him. Furrowing my brow, I walked out on the wing of the wheelhouse, still watching the seaman.

He walked up to the head stevedore and apparently quizzed him. The man only shook his head while continuing to study his clipboard holding the ship's manifest. The seaman then walked right past the captain - as he gazed at him. Receiving yet another negative reply from a forklift driver as to the whereabouts of the man who steers the boat, the kid turned and strolled past the captain. *Again.*

Apparently finding the task a little thirst-provoking, he stopped and lolled about the water can, looking up and down the docks while he slaked his thirst.

Then, as he tossed his crumpled water cup up and down, he strolled one more time past the pondering captain.

Muttering to myself more and more, I began to look for a shackle to bounce off the little, pointy head of the wandering sailor. The din and roar of cranes, forklifts, and shouting dock bosses precluded my calling out to him. And one had better have a good reason for using the ship's whistle.

"This is ludicrous," I thought as I rambled down several decks of stairs and off the gangplank. Angrily eyeing the seaman as he strolled further and further away, I walked up to the crate to relay the urgent message to the captain.

And he was gone.

Beginning to think that I had sailed through the Bermuda Triangle one too many times, I turned to look down the dock.

"What's up, Wil?"

At the sound of the voice I must have jumped about five feet and then twirled around.

There sat the captain.

"I, uh...duh..." I tried to remember what in the blazes I had needed to relay.

The captain eyed me for a second and then glanced at the meandering seaman.

"What's the deal with Tatoo? He's walked past me five times now." [Note to readers: this "Tatoo" is not the Cajun cook of whom I have written in a previous article, but rather a Creole seaman with the same nickname.]

The captain turned his study back to the loading of cargo.

"He's...uh..." I almost said "blind as a bat" - but stopped.

Instead, I intently queried, "How long you been sitting there?"

The captain looked back at me like a thoroughly unconcerned Sphinx and said, "'Bout a half-hour. Why? What's up?"

"I...uh...oh, yeah. The office called," I warbled.

"They want us to leave early," the captain related.

Mesmerized again, I asked, "How'd you know that?"

"They *always* want us to leave early," was the sage-like reply. "What's the matter with Tatoo?" He looked back at the still-wandering seaman.

The latter had turned and was headed

back toward us. I was about to say that he needed to get the !@#\$\$% off the boat (as in "time off"), being that he had blundered and re-blundered right past the captain. But, then again, thinking that I had done the exact same thing, I reconsidered requesting that *I* get the !@#\$\$% off the boat!

Having taken note of the fact that I was having trouble forming an intelligent sentence, the captain said, "Have a seat, Wil."

*Great*, I thought. *Now he thinks that I'm about to pass out from the sun. Oh, well.*

As I sat on the other end of the crate, I began to wonder with what mystical insights the dock chameleon was about to shower me. Or, perhaps a mermaid was about to enticingly poke her head over the dock's edge. In the meantime, the strolling Tatoo waltzed right past us, turned, and did it again.

It was then that I realized that the captain had allowed me to enter his spell of concealment. And I am thoroughly convinced that, should we have continued to sit there, lama-like, the stevedores would have loaded us, crate and all, onto the barge.

This curious ability of that particular captain was noted on several other occasions.

## GENERAL MEETING SUMMARIES AND FEATURED PROGRAM ABSTRACTS

The Laffite Society generally publishes in *The Laffite Society Chronicles* abstracts of featured talks presented at the monthly meetings, when the nature and length of these featured presentations lend themselves to such inclusion, and when the speakers facilitate same. These abstracts might contain information which is in conflict with the opinions of others or with established documentation. The material contained in this section does not, therefore, necessarily reflect an official position of The Laffite Society. The Society does, however, encourage discourse regarding conflicting viewpoints, because it believes such discourse often leads to a broader and deeper understanding of those topics of discussion.

The Society recognizes that *The Laffite Society Chronicles* is its primary link with those members who do not attend monthly meetings. Therefore, whether or not monthly meetings include a featured presentation, the topics therein discussed are presented in summarized fashion in this section, to impart some feeling of those meetings' content.

The Society gratefully acknowledges the work of Secretary Dorothy McD. Karilanic in preparing these summaries from the actual meeting minutes.

### Tuesday, July 14, 1998

This month's featured presentation was a talk given by Laffite Society President R. Dale Olson, titled "Saccarap, an Early City on Galveston Island."

Parliamentarian Diane Olson presented the slate of nominees for Board officers for the 1998 - 2000 biennial term. All nominees were voted in by acclamation. [Editor's note: the current Board roster is published on the last page of this and every issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*.]

Mr. Olson announced a Board meeting of old and new officers for 6:00 p.m. on July 22, 1998, to review duties of respective positions and objectives of The Laffite Society for the coming two-year term.

Mr. Olson mentioned that he had been in touch with a Mr. Don Henricks [sic] of California. Mr. Henricks is a descendant of the Hendricks family, which built the late-nineteenth-century mansion nicknamed "Hendricks Castle" on the alleged site of Jean Laffite's Maison Rouge. Mr. Henricks is the great-grandson of George Johnson, himself a one-time resident of "Hendricks Castle."

First Vice-President Jean L. Epperson reported that she had sent a letter in Spanish, prepared by Laffite Society Secretary Dorothy McD. Karilanic, to the National Museums of Venezuela, SA, to request a copy of a design or picture of the Cartagena revolutionary flag. Ms. Epperson is in the process of having an artistic rendering in color made of the flag in accordance with the details of its description which she at present has. The flag is intended for reproduction in an upcoming issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. [Editor's note: the color print, and the accompanying article titled "Flags Flown at Galveston by the Corsairs and Filibusters," appear in this issue.]

Member-at-Large Dr. Reginald Wilson reported that his relative, Paul Gardiner, who is searching for the alleged burial site of Jean Laffite at the Culp Cemetery near Alton, Illinois, had contacted a man who had been employed by the cemetery from the 1930's to the 1960's. This individual claimed to know nothing of the Laffite grave site, which was said to have been surrounded by a small iron railing. The former employee made reference to another person, a "grave digger," now deceased, who might have known some relevant details.

In a letter to Dr. Wilson, Member-at-Large Patrick Laffite reported from France that he and a group of associates had located evidence that Pierre, Jean, and Dominique Youx were in Baracoa, Cuba, in about 1798. No sources for this information were provided.

Dr. Wilson mentioned that he had acquired a copy of a letter originally sent to Governor Price Daniels by David Allen, then a student at a New York college preparing a master's thesis on Jean Laffite. Dr. Wilson, who answered the letter, said that David Allen had mentioned that he had once taught school in Alton, Illinois (see two paragraphs above regarding the Culp Cemetery, located near Alton).

Mr. Olson remarked that the current production-in-progress of the play, *Laffite of the Maison Rouge*, was very well received by those Laffite Society members who attended the first night's performance at The Strand Theatre in Galveston, and that it obtained good reviews in the local *The Galveston County Daily News*.

Tuesday, August 11, 1998

At this meeting, the new biennial Board of Directors of The Society for 1998 - 2000 officially took office.

Incoming President Kathy Modzelewski expressed thanks on behalf of The Laffite Society to Ex-Officio President R. Dale Olson for his contributions over two terms, and acknowledged the accomplishments and participation of founding members Dorothy McD. Karilanovic, Jim Nonus, and Diane Olson.

Jeff Modzelewski, in his continuing position of Editor-of-Publications, stated that the next issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, planned for September, will focus on events of the period January through June, 1998.

In his new capacity as Treasurer, Mr. Modzelewski reported a Society account balance at the end of July of approximately \$1,377.00. Some of those funds will be used to cover the expense of printing and mailing the next issue of the *Chronicles*, and for miscellaneous postage over the next couple of months.

Incoming First Vice-President Dave Roberts reported that he had recorded two more Laffite "historical vignette" audio tapes. One, entitled "The Descendants of Jean Laffite," was played for meeting attendees, who responded enthusiastically. Mr. Olson suggested that The Laffite Society consider forming an editorial committee to review the vignettes for consistency in format and tone before they are aired over the radio. A suggestion was also offered to publish in *The Laffite Society Chronicles* a request for members to provide ideas for vignette topics, or indeed for entire write-ups, for future taping.

Advisory Board member Dr. Reginald Wilson stated that Robert Schaadt, Director of the Sam Houston Regional Library in Liberty, Texas, has requested a copy of Laffite's privateer seal, along with legend, to mount in an area near the display case containing the original *Journal of Jean Laffite*.

Dr. Wilson reported on the following subjects of research interest:

- Aaron Burr's daughter, Theodosia, wife of Joseph L. Alston, Governor of South Carolina, who was possibly aboard a ship (the *Patriot*) captured by Laffite's men.
- Research on the Culp Cemetery near Alton, Illinois, alleged location of Jean Laffite's grave. Paul Gardiner, Dr. Wilson's cousin, is still in the process of researching this cemetery's history. Eventually, Mr. Gardiner's report and related photos will be forwarded to the Editor-of-Publications for publication in a future issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. [Editor's note: see "The Final Resting Place of Jean Laffite" in the previous issue of this publication.]
- A document known as the "Registry of Deliberations," which contained the rules and regulations, or "constitution," written by the founders of the Galveston commune. The original document in French, unsigned by Jean Laffite, is housed in the Fort Worth federal archives. Dr. Wilson said that he would place a copy of the original document, along with an English translation, in the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center at Liberty, Texas, and in The Laffite Society archives.
- A telephone conversation with Jane Surratt, wife of John Surratt (Mr. Surratt is the nephew of Lacey Laffite, who was the wife of John Andrychene Laffite). Dr. Wilson provided Society Secretary Dorothy McD. Karilanovic with a typescript of the conversation. Mrs. Surratt claimed to have a ledger "with some writing in it" which she says belonged to Jean Laffite's family. Dr. Wilson has requested that Mrs. Surratt consider allowing him to see the ledger in order to examine this handwriting.

Tuesday, September 8, 1989

No featured presentation took place at this meeting.

Treasurer Jeff Modzelewski gave the balance in the treasury as \$1,412.33. Mr. Modzelewski stated that the Society's finances were in good shape, and that one contributing factor to this condition was the cutting of costs since the prior year on production of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. The average treasury balance for 1997 had been \$850.00; for the first eight months of 1998, it stood at about \$1,350.00.

Third Vice-President Jim Nonus mentioned the upcoming premiere on September 27 of *The Pirate Island of Jean Laffite*, a new film by C. Grant Mitchell, at the Pier 21 theater, preceded and succeeded by a "Sunset Soirée" dockside at Willie G.'s Restaurant in Galveston. Both events are to benefit preservation of the restored 19<sup>th</sup>-century "tall ship" *Elissa*.

Mr. Nonus suggested that members consider another visit to the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center at Liberty, Texas; in addition, plans are in the making for a special-event trip to Nachitoches, Louisiana, in the spring of 1999.

Editor-of-Publications Jeff Modzelewski reported that the January-through-June, 1998, issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles* will be out in October, 1998. Mr. Modzelewski also said that he now has a scanner with which to make copies of photographic materials to include in the *Chronicles*.

Ex-Officio Laffite Society President R. Dale Olson will give a talk on "Saccarap, an Early City on Galveston Island," to The East End Historical Association at its monthly meeting on October 1, 1998.

Author, archeologist, Laffite researcher and Society Advisory Board member Robert C. Vogel will speak at The Laffite Society's November 10<sup>th</sup> meeting on "The Cultural Ecology of Galveston Island, 1816 - 1821."

Advisory Board member and dedicated researcher Dr. Reginald Wilson has received a letter from French language scholar and linguist Gene Marshall of the Department of Languages at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Mr. Marshall reported on his findings following his recent re-translation of *The Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story*. This new translation from the original French was requested by The Laffite Society and facilitated by Professor Thomas Watson, also of McNeese State.

Society Secretary Dorothy Karilanovic reported that in June, 1998, The Laffite Society received a "second installment" of information for the Society archives from Richard B. Smith and The Company of West Yorkshire, England, on their findings from on-going efforts to decipher the 1820 Thomas Beale ciphers. Ms. Karilanovic stated that Mr. Smith, the principle decoder of the ciphers, said that upon completion of his work, it is the intention of his group to travel to the United States to present their findings to the U.S. government. At this time Mr. Smith will apply for licenses to excavate for the alleged vast treasure mentioned in the ciphers. According to Ms. Karilanovic, it is Mr. Smith's belief that the results of his findings will set right, once and for all, the correct history of the fates of Jean and Pierre Laffite, whom Smith believes met their deaths in 1823 - 1824. Mr. Smith also stated that he might try to arrange a visit to Galveston during his travel to the U.S., to present his findings to The Laffite Society.

Dr. Wilson displayed photographs taken by his cousin, researcher Paul Gardiner, in the general vicinity of the Culp Cemetery near Alton, Illinois. Also made available for viewing was a photocopy of a small, hand-drawn map, showing the possible location of Laffite's grave. Member-at-Large Norman Sachnik suggested that The Society write to request information on obtaining satellite photographs of the area. The specific focus of this action would be an attempt to identify traces of iron ornamentation buried in the soil, presumably the remnants of a railing which once encircled the grave site and which was described by John A. Laffite, alleged great-grandson of Jean Laffite.

Dr. Wilson presented a copy in color of the Jean Laffite privateer seal with Jean Laffite's signature to Mr. Modzelewski for inclusion in *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. [Editor's note: see "The Saga of the Seal," and the accompanying color print, in the previous issue of the *Chronicles*.] Dr. Wilson has generously offered to underwrite the cost of the color reproduction of this unique document.

Dr. Wilson provided, for attendees' viewing, photocopies of several documents of interest, as follows:

- "The Galveston Project, Registry of Deliberations, Made at Galveston, April 15, 1817," together with a copy of the original document in French.
- "United States District Court - U.S. vs. Certain Goods Taken at Barataria, Filed October 22, 1814," with a signature (this document lists goods taken by Ross-Patterson in October, 1814).
- A letter of pardon for the Baratarians dated February 6, 1815, from President James Madison.
- Laffite's letter to Graham, dated April 26, 1818, acknowledging his letter requesting that he [Laffite] be apprised of President Monroe's authorization to question him.

Advisory Board member and author Jean L. Epperson gave to the Society's archive a copy of a 1993 spiral-bound book prepared under the auspices of the Louisiana Student Teachers, titled *Jean Laffite and the Baratarians: A Resource Unit*, by Martin Cortez.

Ms. Karilanovic reported that she had added to the Society's archive the following documents translated under her hand:

- A set of "signaling directions" for ships entering the waters of Galveston during the Laffite era (translated from French to English).
- An "Order for Cargo" Permit (French to English).
- Correspondence from the Cuban Archive from Pierre and Jean Laffite from February to September, 1817, relating to their activities as Spanish agents during occupation of Galveston Island (Spanish to English).

Finally, attendees were reminded to donate to the refreshment fund at each meeting so that everyone might continue to enjoy this amenity of food and drink organized monthly by volunteers.

#### Tuesday, October 13, 1998

The featured speaker for this evening was Ginny Brown, Galveston resident and popular local history buff, who talked about Galveston history and Laffite lore. Ms. Brown referred to a little-known supposition that one possible location for Laffite's Maison Rouge was at the site of the present-day residential development of Havre Laffite in Galveston.

Laffite Society Treasurer Jeff Modzelewski reported a balance in the account of approximately \$1,000.00, net of payment for printing costs for the latest issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*.

According to Parliamentarian Diane and Ex-Officio President R. Dale Olson, plans are under way for a trip to the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, one alleged location of the graves of Jean and Pierre Laffite, in mid-January, 1999. Thus far committed to the trip are Advisory Board member Robert Vogel and Member-at-Large Kathleen Taylor of Minnesota; a "maybe" is Advisory Board member Robert Looper.

Mr. Vogel will discuss plans for the Natchitoches, Louisiana, special-event trip, scheduled for the spring of 1999, at The Laffite Society's November 10<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Editor-of-Publications Jeff Modzelewski distributed to those members present copies of the January-through-June, 1998, issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. Mr. Modzelewski acknowledged with thanks and appreciation Advisory Board member Dr. Reginald Wilson's contribution in underwriting costs of the color printing of the Laffite privateer seal included in that *Chronicles*.

Attendees were reminded that the featured speaker for the November 10<sup>th</sup> meeting will be Mr. Vogel, who will talk on "The Cultural Ecology of Galveston Island, 1816 - 1821."

A proposal has been made by a group in Austin, Texas, to scan *The Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story*, along with the copybooks in the collection at the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center in Liberty, Texas, for placement onto a CD-ROM.

Dr. Wilson mentioned that he had held additional conversations with Jane Surratt, who promised to send him a Laffite "ledger" so that he might examine the handwriting contained therein (see the last item in the recap of the August, 1998, meeting, above).

Regarding research into the Culp Cemetery near Alton, Illinois, Dr. Wilson suggested that the use of a metal detector might turn up pieces of the iron railing said to have been around the alleged grave of



Jean Laffite. In addition, Dr. Wilson mentioned that Advisory Board member Pam Keyes, former Secretary of the now-defunct The Laffite Study Group and Editor of its *The Laffite Study Group Newsletter*, will make a trip to St. Louis with her husband and will inspect the Culp Cemetery environs while there. Mrs. Keyes's findings will be written up in a future article for *The Laffite Society Chronicles*.

Dr. Wilson further mentioned that his research indicates that in the cargo manifests of Laffite's ships there was no mention of slaves nor money taken from the privateer's prey.

#### Tuesday, November 10, 1998

The featured special lecture for this meeting was titled "Cultural Ecology of Galveston, 1816 - 1821," presented by Advisory Board member Robert C. Vogel. The contents of this talk are intended for eventual publication.

Society Treasurer Jeff Modzelewski reported a balance in the account of \$1,270.00, less mailing costs of about \$150.00 to be incurred in the near future for the recent issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*.

The special-event trip to Natchitoches, Louisiana, has been tentatively scheduled for March 19 - 21, 1999.

The Society's annual Holiday Party has been scheduled for Saturday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, at The Eiband's Gallery in Galveston. A "pot-luck" buffet is planned. The event will be hosted and coordinated by Second Vice-President Judy Dolfi.

Robert C. Vogel discussed his plans for his upcoming trip to the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico in mid-January of 1999, for the interest of members and visitors who might want to join him and his wife, Kathleen Taylor, in following in the footsteps of the Laffites in their post-Galveston period.

President Kathy Modzelewski and Editor-of-Publications Jeff Modzelewski presented a proposal for a "Speakers Bureau" along with an outline of suggested topics. Four to five volunteers were called upon to submit text sufficient to fill a speaking time of about thirty-five to forty minutes. These submissions will be edited by Mr. Modzelewski and then presented to the Board for final approval. Any reference source may be used in researching topics; Mr. Modzelewski suggested, as an example, the book *Jean Laffite, Prince of Pirates*, by Jack C. Ramsay, Jr. (Eakin Press, Austin, TX: 1996).

Society Secretary Dorothy Karilanovic reported that she will submit to Mr. Modzelewski, for consideration for publication in *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, four letters written by Pierre and Jean Laffite in 1817. Ms. Karilanovic translated these letters into English from Spanish. The letters were obtained by Robert C. Vogel from a set of documents originally housed in the Cuban National Archive. According to Mr. Vogel, the Cuban material is more comprehensive than the documents filed in the Archivo de las Indias in Seville, Spain; it is "... closer to the original sources of the correspondence and reports (the Spanish consuls in New Orleans, the captain-generals in Havana, and the officials in Mexico) and contains some material that was never copied into other archives." The letters of August 16 and September 1, 1817, are of special note, according to Mr. Vogel.

Mrs. Karilanovic also stated she had received a faxed letter from Richard B. Smith of The Company in West Yorkshire, England, who is in the process of deciphering the Thomas Beale ciphers, reported to contain information regarding the burial site of a large treasure. Ms. Karilanovic stated that, according to Mr. Smith, and based on information he continues to retrieve from the ciphers, Thomas J. Beale may have been an alias of Jean Laffite. In a short, faxed communication from Mr. Smith dated September 23, 1998, he mentioned that he had received "a code readout [giving] the name of Jean's son." In her reply to Mr. Smith of September 29, 1998, Ms. Karilanovic mentioned the names "Jules" and "Glenn" as those known to have been given Jean's sons, and asked Mr. Smith the name he had retrieved from his decoding efforts. His reply on October 31<sup>st</sup> was the following: "Re: Jean's son's name: sorry, but at this moment in time still collating further data." In this letter also, Mr. Smith gave information on a book title he believes that The Laffite Society might want to acquire for its archive: *The Beale Treasure: "New" History of a Mystery*, by Peter Viemeister, published by Hamilton's, P.O. Box 932, 155 W. Main St.,

Bedford, VA, 24523; telephone: (540) 586-5592; fax: (540) 586-6235; price, \$22.50.

Of further note in Mr. Smith's fax of October 31<sup>st</sup>, according to Ms. Karilanovic, is this statement: "Having read the above book, there is a positive line of connection between "Beale Senior/Junior, and Jean, Pierre, and Dominique. Beale Senior's plantation perfect hide-out for the Laffites. Beale Junior too young to lead so-called hunting trip in the 1820's (approx. 19 yrs. old). However, impossible for 'Jean' to impersonate Junior; but able to impersonate father."

Ms. Karilanovic also mentioned that she had received an inquiry from a Mrs. Fred Brown of Dallas, Texas, concerning genealogical information on an associate of Jean Laffite, John Ducoigne. With her letter, Mrs. Brown included copies of depositions made by John Ducoigne of his account of the governance of the Laffite commune on Galveston Island. These papers will be placed in The Laffite Society archive at The Eiband's Gallery in Galveston.

Special acknowledgments were extended to Members-at-Large Betty Wilson and Nell Whittington, and to Advisory Board member Jean L. Epperson, for providing the evening's delicious refreshments.

Saturday, December 12, 1998

The Laffite Society held its annual Holiday Party at The Eiband's Gallery in Galveston. As has become traditional, the formalities of regular monthly meetings were suspended.

## 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 member 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 Kathy Modzelewski c/o The Eiband's Gallery at (409) 763-5495. The Laffite Society attempts to mail information to members and interested parties on the Society's mailing list as special event details are determined.

## "THE STORY OF LAFFITE" AUDIO TAPE PROJECT

By a vote of The Laffite Society's Board of Directors, it was decided to pursue a project proposed by then-Pres Director Dave Roberts, to consist of the creation of a series of audio tapes related to the story of Jean and Pierre Laffite. Over past months, Mr. Roberts has recorded several prototype tapes and played them at some Society regular monthly meetings. Although currently still in a preparatory stage, it is expected that Society members and other interested individuals will assist in the writing, editing, and critical review of each script. Topics will include some of the most basic elements of the Laffite story; initial scripts have dealt with "Descendants of Jean Laffite," "[Galveston Island's] The Storm of 1818," and "Dominique You."

Each tape will be approximately five minutes in length, and will be prepared for airing on the local Galveston, Texas, radio station, KGBC. Background music will be dubbed to provide an introduction and closing to the narration. It is envisioned that a group of perhaps as many as fifty tapes will be recorded in a professional recording studio by Mr. Roberts, who has a long affiliation with the radio industry. Upon completion of the project, The Society will discuss various additional possible uses for the set of tapes, including making them available on loan to members.

Interested parties are encouraged to submit finished scripts; ideas for script topics; or requests for information, length guidelines, etc., to Mr. Roberts in care of the post office box listed inside the front cover of this publication.

# THE LAFFITE SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS AUGUST 1998 - JULY 2000

PRESIDENT .....	KATHY MODZELEWSKI
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT .....	DAVE ROBERTS
SECOND VICE PRESIDENT .....	JUDY DOLFI
THIRD VICE PRESIDENT .....	JIM NONUS
SECRETARY .....	DOROTHY McDONALD KARILANOVIC
TREASURER .....	JEFF MODZELEWSKI
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HISTORIAN .....	BERNADETTE FOLEY
EDITOR OF PUBLICATIONS .....	JEFF MODZELEWSKI
PRESS DIRECTOR .....	GEORGE NAJARIAN

# THE LAFFITE SOCIETY ADVISORY BOARD August 1998 - July 2000

Jim Earthman	Robert Looper
Jean L. Epperson	Randy Pace
Bill Foley	Robert Vogel
Pam Keyes	Reginald Wilson

# MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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

Annual dues are as follows:

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