

# The Laffite Society Chronicles

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## THE EDITOR'S PAGE

Don C. Marler

*The Laffite Society Chronicles* is beginning a series of biographical sketches on Laffite aficionados beginning with those who were involved with the Laffite Society's predecessor--The Laffite Study Group. The series, known as the "Bio Project," will be coordinated by member Jean L. Epperson. Member, Dan Cote, has volunteered to do the photography for anyone needing a current photo for the project.

We start the series with contributions from the Laffite Study Group (LSG). The LSG was started by Laffite Society member, Robert Vogel, in 1975. For a short history of the Study Group see Robert Vogel, "Brief History of The Laffite Study Group, 1975-1990" *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1998. See also Roberts "Remembering the Laffite Study Group" in this current issue. Pam Keyes has kicked off the bio portion of the project with her own "bio" in this issue of *The Laffite Chronicles*.

Members interested in submitting their biographical information are asked to follow the guidelines given below.

### Guidelines for Bios

The Bio Project will feature a brief biographical sketch and photo of any member of the Laffite Society who wishes to have his/her bio published in *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. Those not wishing to have a bio published can opt out or request to have their bio filed in the Society's Archives.

In order to bring to this project a measure of consistency, the following guidelines are offered:

1. Each member writes his/her own biographical sketch and furnishes a photo. Dan Cote will take a photo of you for this purpose if you wish.

2. Include the following items:

- A. Real name, aka, or pen names.
- B. Age -optional.
- C. Birth place
- D. Occupation
- E. Current interests or projects.
- F. Relationship to the Laffite Society (member, officer, etc.).
- G. Year joined Laffite Society.
- H. A narrative not to exceed 500 words.
- I. Photo.

3. Please give permission for editing your bio.

4. Bios and the photo should be submitted to member Jean Epperson. They should be on computer disk or sent by email if possible or typed and sent to her at: 550 CR 401 Dayton, Texas 77535. She can be reached at 281 385 2122, or email [J.Epperson@ev1.net](mailto:J.Epperson@ev1.net)

5. Bios will be published on a first come first served basis except in the case of some event that justifies moving someone up front such as when a member makes news, has a speaking engagement or publishes an article or book.

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### Publication of Minutes

Due to space limitations we have ceased publishing the minutes of the meetings of the Society in *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. They are on file in the archives and are on the website. The minutes can be accessed at: <http://thelaffitesociety.com/> and are

available in hard copy upon submission  
of a request to the secretary.

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### Anniversary Celebration

Next year is the tenth anniversary of the  
Laffite Society. A project is underway to  
mark that event by publication of an  
anthology of previously published  
articles. These will come from *Life and*

*Times of Jean Laffite, The Laffite  
Chronicles, Louisiana History* and other  
sources. Members are asked to  
recommend articles for inclusion in the  
anthology as well as a photo, drawing  
or other ideas to enhance the cover.  
Submit suggestions to me at:

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# BARATARIA: THE STRANGE HISTORY OF JEAN LAFFITE, PIRATE

by  
LOUIS-JEAN CALVET<sup>1</sup>

An inquiry into the authenticity of Jean Laffite's "Diary", translated from the  
French

by Dorothy McDonald Karilanovic

## INTRODUCTION

In 1998, Louis-Jean Calvet, French author, wrote a book entitled *Barataria: l'étrange histoire de Jean Laffite, pirate*. In a postscript chapter, *Le Dossier Laffite* (The Laffite Case), Calvet gives an overview of the familiar historical elements of the history of Laffite which have come down to us from well known writers, travelers, diarists, and researchers. In this account, Calvet presents his observations and conclusions, especially on the authenticity of the controversial *Journal of Jean Laffite* alleged to have been hand written in French by the pirate Jean Laffite in the years 1845-1850.

Prior to publication of his book, the author visited the Sam Houston Library and Research Center in Liberty, TX where he was able to examine in hand the various documents in the Laffite collection, the textual material of which had been acquired in 1975, and the pictures, in 1989, as a result of a gift from Texas Governor Price Daniel. Calvet states he was able to examine up closely the famous *Journal*, obtaining a photocopy for his research; also the family Bible in which Laffite is supposed to have written the names and birth dates of family members; the daguerreotype representing him with his family; and the small painting attributed to [Manuel de] Franca. In the course of examining the diary and attempting to decide for himself if the document could, in fact, be a forgery, the author makes several observations. He states that in most cases the *Journal* offers no new facts, but is an explication of those already known, suggesting that if the diary is in fact a forgery, the forger would only have needed to be well informed of the facts stated, only needing to re-state them from a new perspective.

The text also has errors, says Calvet. One reads that Jean Laffite left Galveston in March, 1821, a date repeated by all after the publication of *The History of Texas* by [Henderson K.] Yoakum in 1855 and apparently not known as an error by the writer of the diary or by the translator(s). For in fact a document discovered in the American Federal archives, a letter from the commandant of *The Enterprise* to the commandant of the Secretary of State of the Navy, shows that this event actually took place in 1820, not 1821.<sup>2</sup> The author also points out the puzzling discrepancy of the date of death of Jean Laffite's brother Pierre, stated in the [Ignacio] Rubio Mañe records as being November 9, 1821, as opposed to the information given in baptismal records in New Orleans, indicating that Pierre was the father of several children well after 1821.

Calvet goes on to choose three areas of interest, each of very different nature, but all, he says, at least in part verifiable. He outlines these areas as follows:

1) Information which is in the *Journal* of the marriage of Pierre Laffite and of his descendants. 2) Laffite's genealogical tree given in the family Bible, that is to say, the dates and places of birth of his father, his mother, his brothers and sisters, the given names of the latter. 3) What is said in the *Journal* of the meeting of Jean Laffite with Karl Marx and Friederich Engels.

Following, then, is a direct translation of Calvet's text (pages 292 through 305 in his chapter *Le Dossier Laffite*), presenting his findings relative to his investigation in the above three areas.

D. K.

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Let's start then with the first area of interest: Pierre Laffite. According to Lyle Saxon [Laffite author], he would have had important descendants:

- A son in 1808, Pierre, of which one does not know the name of the mother, who was raised by the Sauvignets and would have married a Cuban, Marie Berret, from whom he had a son, François, born August 23, 1828. In 1838, a François Laffite is in fact buried in the St. Louis Cemetery: this could possibly be an infant, who died at 10 years of age (or at 13 as we will see further on).

- A daughter with Adélaïde Maselari, Marie Joseph, born October 27, 1810. According to Saxon, she was still single in 1830 and lived with the Sauvignets, some friends of the brothers Laffite, at 141 Hospital Street. I, on my own, found mention of the marriage of a Mary Joseph [sic] Laffite with Joseph Loquevick, April 6, 1838, in Caddo parish, and this may be she even if in this age girls generally married before the age of 28 years.

- Then from Marie-Louise Villars, a quadroon woman, a woman one-quarter white, with whom he had, always according to Saxon, seven children of which the eldest, Rose, was born August 28, 1812.

This would lead us to nine infants, but these pose some problems. According to the archivist of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, who performed for me the research in the baptismal books, François Laffite was not born in 1828 but in 1825 of Pierre Laffite, born at Bordeaux, and of Marie Veret (and not Berret). And the couple already had a daughter, Marie, born between 1822 and 1824. But who is this Pierre Laffite? Is he, as Saxon writes, the son of Pierre, the young infant that Esau Glasscock saw, or, rather, is he the father, the brother of Jean? In fact, if Pierre "the younger" was born in 1808 and if it is rather he who appeared to cohabit with Marie Veret, he would have been between 14 and 17 years old on the birth of his first child. On the other hand, how would he have been able to be born in 1808 at Bordeaux at a time when his father was in New Orleans since 1804? For this it would be necessary to suppose a trip of the father or of the mother in Europe of which we find not a trace. All this then leaves us to

think that this would be, rather, Pierre "the elder" who, with Marie Veret or Berret, has two children, Marie and François. This would bring his direct descendants to at least eleven children. Nevertheless, the archivist of the Archdiocese of New Orleans only found mention of four of them, issuing from three different mothers (which seems to perturb him a little for he underlines in his letter "with different mothers' names"!), "*avec des noms de mère différents*"!) to which is added in 1827 or 1828 a John Baptiste "Laffite et Devilliere" [sic] (but to be precise the text is difficult to read). As follows, the details of the birth:

- Marie Joseph Laffite, both in 1810, daughter of Pierre Laffite, of Bayonne and of Adélaïde [sic] Maselari, of Santo Domingo.

- Jean Laffite, born in 1816, son of Pedro Lafitte [sic] of Bordeaux and of Maria Luisa Villard, of New Orleans (this birth is noted in the book of "free persons of color" in the St. Louis Cathedral, the following appear in the book of whites).

- Maria Lafitte [sic], born between 1822 and 1824, daughter of Pierre Lafitte [sic] of Bordeaux and of Maria Veret of Baracoa, Cuba.

- François Lafitte [sic], born in 1825, son of Pierre Lafitte [sic] of Bordeaux, and of Maria Veret of Baracoa, Cuba.

- Jean Baptiste Lafitte [sic] and Devilliers, [sic] born between 1827 and 1828.

It seems then that the truest hypothesis may be the one that makes Pierre the father of all these children, which would prove that he was still living in 1825.

With, here still, a mystery: Why does this father declare himself, as is the case, to be born in Bayonne or in Bordeaux? We will see later on that he was without a doubt not born in either one of these towns, but a constant practice of the two brothers consistently without cease was to mix their identities to conceal to the mainstream their movements.

If Pierre Laffite is then definitely present in the archives of the Diocese, Jean, in contrast, never appears there. Lyle Saxon claims that he had a child with the young sister of Marie-Louise Villars, Catherine, but gives neither date nor reference, and in this absence it is difficult to follow up on.

On the other hand, in the *Journal of Jean Laffite*, written then much later, one does not find, regarding Pierre, any mention of Marie-Louise Villars nor of Marie Veret who well and truly existed. But, according to this text, Pierre had been married to a certain Françoise Sel, the daughter of a painter originally from Santo Domingo, of whom he had four sons, Jean-Jacques, Pierre-Charles, César Edouard and Eugène-Louis, and two daughters. And one does not find any trace of these six births in the archives of New Orleans. On these different points, then, it is difficult to grant credit to the *Journal*, except to admit that its writer had "forgotten" three women and their infants and that, besides, the children of Pierre and of Françoise Sel had never been registered in the church.<sup>3</sup>

Let us move on then to the genealogy of the Laffite family. If one believes the information written on this by Jean Laffite in the family Bible, his father, Marcus Laffite, would have been born in Pontarlier in 1744, of Jacques Alexis Laffite (he, himself, born in Saint-Jean d'Angély) and Yvonne Delsilles (born in Saintes in 1718, died in 1752), and died September 3, 1818 in Philadelphia. He would have married, in December, 1765 in Nice, Maria Zora Nadrimal, 17 years old, born in Dax September 22, 1748, died in Port-au-Prince May 9, 1783. It is necessary here to underline an important improbability: according to the text of the Bible, the marriage of Marcus Laffite and Maria Nadrimal took place in "Nice, Provence, France". Now, in 1765, in the time written in the *Journal*, Nice was not French but Italian, and Provence ceased at Var. Furthermore, the archives in the town of Pontarlier, where the records of 1537 to 1792 were cleared out and copied in alphabetical order on cards, do not give any trace of the birth of a Maria Zora Nadrimal in Dax.

Let us pursue analysis of information in the family Bible. The first daughter, Marie, was born in Digne January 3, 1767, and died in April, 1811 in Port-au-Prince. Then the couple left France for Santo Domingo, with little Marie and her grandmother. It is there that the following children were born:

- Anna (August 28, 1769-April, 1811).

- Alexandre Frédéric (April 14, 1771, Port-au-Prince, November 15, 1830, New Orleans).

- Henri (Port-au-Prince, January 6, 1775-Cartagena, November, 1840).

- Yvonne (Port-au-Prince, May 26, 1777-1779, March, 1850).

- Pierre Laffite (Port-au-Prince, October 21, 1779- St. Louis, Missouri, March 9, 1844).

- And finally Jean, born April 22, 1782, in Port-au-Prince.

We add to this René Beluche who, in the *Journal*, many times is present under the spelling Reyne Beluche, as the uncle of the Laffite brothers.

This list is composed above all of names of which we have no trace but one, Alexandre Frédéric, who passed to posterity under the name of Dominique You or Youx, according to the sources. We have many a time encountered this pirate captain who, with his boat *La Superbe*, boarded three ships in 1806. You was, all throughout the known and proven history of the Laffite brothers, at their sides, their advisor, their favorite captain. But was he truly their older brother? As a matter of fact, we do not have any difficulty following the trail of Dominique You, for, after the facts that we have related [cited in a previous chapter], he remained in New Orleans and he died there. On this occasion, the parish priest, L. Muni, writes in his register (Book X, p. 185, Act No. 1139):

"... the body of the deceased Dominique You was buried, formerly ship captain, age about 58 years, native of Saint-Jean-d'Angély, department of the Charente-Inférieure (France) ..."

And we have there an exemplary case of our problem. In fact, the writer of the *Journal*, whomever he may be, could not be unaware of the date and the place of the death of You, and he gives to them then: November 15, 1830 in New Orleans. But he adds the date and the place of his birth (April 14, 1771, Port-au-Prince), and thus enters a contradiction with the church register. Is Frédéric then named You or Laffite? Is he born in Santo Domingo or in Saint-Jean-d'Angély? In the parish books of Saint-Jean-d'Angély, one finds no trace of Dominique You. On the other hand, this name under different spellings (Hiou, Hyou, You, Iou, Hioux, Youx), is very present there. One encounters there, in

fact, for the period that interests us, three families where the name is not always spelled in the same fashion. [1] The Hiou family: Alexandre Hiou (fisherman, born in 1743) and Marie Gharau (born in 1753), their sons Brice Hiou (shoemaker, born in 1769) and Alexandre Hiou (born in 1797, 7 "*brumaire* year 5"). [2] The You or Hiou family: André You (stone cutter) and Marie Jaubertin (or Gamberthie, or Jauberte), their infants Jean-Baptiste Hyou, born "the 24 *thermidore* - year 9 (1801), Auguste, born the "7 *fructidor* - year 10 (1802), and Marguerite, died in 1820 at 2 years of age. [3] The Iou family (sometimes Hioux or Youx): Pierre Iou (barrel maker) and Marie Briffou, their children Pierre, dead in 1770 at 11 \_ years of age, Marie Iou, born in 1764 (baptized at 7 \_ years October 22, 1771) and Marie, born in 1773.

Dominique You, then, does not appear in these registers. But his patronyme [surname] You, Iou, or Hiou, is in France extremely rare, and the coincidence is all the same striking: dead in New Orleans November 15, 1830, "at the age of about 58 years, born in Saint-Jean-d'Angély", according to the death register, he would be then born in 1772 and could have been the son of Alexandre Hiou, the brother of Brice Hiou. But one sees here that there are only hypotheses.

With regard to René Beluche, his life is well known, and he would not be known in any case to be the uncle of the brothers Laffite. Born in New Orleans December 15, 1780 of a French father originally from Tours, became, after his collaboration with the Baratarians, admiral of the fleet of Simón Bolívar, he will die in exile in 1860. His remains were exhumed in 1963 and repose now in Caracas along side of those of Bolívar and other Venezuelan heroes.

These different biographical particulars hardly lead to giving credit to the miraculously discovered *Journal*.

There remains the third point on which I indicated research, the relations of Jean Laffite with Marx and Engels in 1847. In his *Journal*, Laffite states that he leaves St. Louis for Europe in June, 1847, and returns to America in January, 1848. He holds a discussion of a socialistic tone, explaining that he has always dreamed of a change in

the relations between men, that he does not support the suffering and misery of men and that, rightly so, things remain to do, in Europe and in America, to change the state of the world. Follows is a list of the people that he met: Louis Bertillon, in whose home he lived in Paris, Michel Chevreul, Louis Braille, Augustin Thierry, Alexis de Toqueville, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Jules Michelet, Urbain Leverrier, François Gaizot, Louis Daguerre. And he states precisely that he stayed in Paris, Berlin, Brussels (Anvers) and Amsterdam.

In a letter sent from Brussels at the end of the month of September, which is found also in John Lafflin's documents [John Lafflin, alleged great grandson of Jean Laffite], he gives other details:

Brussels the 29 of September 1847  
M. De Franca  
St. Louis, Mo.

Pine St. 7 and 8

Sir,

I leave Brussels for Paris next in three or four weeks. I will go to Amsterdam, then in route to America. I had a number of conversations with Mr. Marx and Mr. Engels, but I refused to participate in the meetings with the other debaters to form the manifesto, because I did not want to be known or identified with the other men.

Mr. Engels went<sup>4</sup> with me to Paris in order for me to prepare the list to finance Mr. Marx and him, for a long time in advance to continue their manuscripts and to have them put in texts on *Capital and the Worker*. From the beginning it seems to me that the two young men are those [?]<sup>5</sup> gifted with abilities and talents, and which I believe strongly are the best chosen for qualities suitable in the statistical research on "The Category of Capital", Value, Price, and Benefit.

They penetrated into a forgotten time in the history of the

exploitation of man by man in its stages. From serfdom, feudalism, slavery and the salaried slave, discovering that exploitation is at the base of everything bad. This had taken much time in order to prepare the *Manifesto of the Workers of the World* [*The Workers' Manifesto*]. A great debate took place between the two young men and with others in Berlin, Amsterdam, Paris, and others in the Swiss Republic.

I am enthusiastic about the manifesto and some other projects for the future and support with all my heart the two young men. I hope and I pray that the projects become the adhesive for a strong doctrine in order to strike the foundations of the highest dynasties and make them fall into the teeth of the lower classes.

Mr. Marx advises me and notified me not to plunge in entirely with the manifesto in America for there are others with the same [illegible]<sup>6</sup> for New York.<sup>7</sup> But I hope that Jean or Harry show the manifesto to Mr. Joshua Speed and he in turn can show it to Mr. Lincoln. I know that nothing can intimidate him otherwise, he shares the same risks, his occupation in Washington would be a sacred promise that the path I am on is in conformity with continued politics at present in the republic of Texas.

Mr. Marx accepts some of my writings on the communes that I had been forced to abandon at one time, weighing carefully the rules and regulations not based on any strong foundation like he names, a pure and simple utopia without preamble or a manifest body on which one builds. I was in agreement with the two young men on this date in regard to my utopian dreams of the past, the sacrifices made in order to preserve the most grand manuscript that was composed and its constitution, with the stars and the stripes to last eternally, but not with those in power to abuse or exploit them.

Oh! In my fear, I covered the abuses [J'ai dû couvrir les abus]<sup>8</sup> practiced in the last part of the same year after the Dragon was uprooted and annihilated. I described my second commune which I was forced to disband and to abandon with a fire<sup>9</sup> the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, 1821. I then made the resolution to re-direct myself without concealment to not ever again help those who oppose my principles.

I must come to a close. I will bring several manuscripts and the manifesto. I hope that Jules and Glenn are making progress at the school with Mademoiselle Wing and Mademoiselle Burgess. I know that they have lots of patience as professor. Glenn is not as strong as Jules.

My best wishes and good health.

Your devoted servant,

Alex Jn Laffite.

One sees that the French written by the presumed Laffite is peculiar. Is it possible that after about forty years passed in the United States he had at this point lost his maternal language at a time that he had lived a long time in Louisiana, among French speaking persons? One can doubt this. In fact, there are too many bizarre, incorrect formulations in the text for it to have been written by a French speaking person. Added are numerous anglicisms, like "J'ai refusé de participé *dans* les conférences [to participate in] avec les autres débateurs [debaters]<sup>10</sup>, or "Il y a une fois" which [Stanley] Arthur translates "some time ago" ["one time", "once"] . . . One finds the same characteristics in the text of the *Journal*. The dates there are systematically given in the English style ("Monday the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1817, Thursday the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1847, Monday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1850, etc.)<sup>11</sup>; "langage" and it is written "language". One finds there without cease amazing forms in French which appear completely obvious when one looks for their equivalent in English: "battre une retraite" for "battre en retraite" (English - to beat a retreat),



"expectation" for "attente", "des foules sympathiques à l'équipage" for "favorables à l'équipage" (English *sympathetic*), "Les vice-roi du Mexique ne sentaient de relief" (English - "to feel some relief", the soldiers "célèbrent le triomphe et la victoire" for "fêtent" la victoire (English - to celebrate), etc. There is often the impression in these texts, the *Journal*, like the different letters of Laffite, that they were written by an English-speaking person, first thought of in English and drafted in French, indeed, translated from English. And if this characteristic has not ever been emphasized up to now, it is without a doubt because the researchers inclined toward the history of Jean Laffite have been English-speaking persons in the majority and were not aware, perhaps, of the incoherences in the French text.<sup>12</sup>

But it is a question then of indirect proof and presumption. How to verify this amazing autobiography according to which Laffite would meet in Paris a variety of personalities? The persons cited in the *Journal* were all, for certain, living at that time, and Laffite would have been able to meet them: Louis Adolphe Bertillon, whose house he would have stayed in Paris (1821-1883); Michel Chevreul (1786-1889), Louis Braille (1809-1852), Augustin Thierry (1795-1856), Alexis De Tocqueville (1805-1859), Jules Michelet (1798-1874), Urbain Leverrier (1811-1877), François Guizot (1787-1874), Louis Daguerre (who in fact is named Jacques, 1787-1851). But this does not absolutely prove that he had actually met them. Marx and Engels remain on whom we will fix our attention at more length.

Jean Laffite would have then sojourned in Europe from June, 1847 to the beginning of the month of January, 1848 (on his return, he writes to his wife in New York the 8<sup>th</sup> of January). During this period (from August, 1846 to the end of 1847), Marx is living in Brussels, but moves now and then (to England and Germany). In the letter of September 29, Laffite declares having been "in numerous talks with Marx and Engels. He makes reference to a project that he calls "the Workers' Manifesto of the World", and a little later, he writes: "I am enthusiastic about the manifesto and of the other projects". Then, he explains that Engels went with him to Paris:

"Mr. Engels went with me to Paris for the purpose of my preparing for him a list to finance Mr. Marx and him for a long time in advance in order to continue their manuscripts and to have published *Capital and Labor*". In the *Journal* he says nearly the same thing, without making references to some publications, explaining that he opened a bank account in Paris to finance Marx and Engels and to help them in their revolutionary enterprise. And it is this passage which caused Stanley Arthur to write that Laffite financed the publication of the *Manifesto*. Now, here it may be necessary to question closer the chronology. The *Communist Manifesto* was written at the request of the second Congress of the Communist League, meeting together the end of November and the beginning of December, 1847 in London, a city in which Laffite, according to his statements, did not go. The first congress, meeting some months earlier, at the beginning of the month of June, also in London, had decided to publish a "Profession of communist faith" which was entrusted to Engels. The idea was to make a kind of catechism, in part a series of questions ("What is communism and what do the communists want, what is socialism and what do the socialists want", etc.) to which responses, for certain, would be provided. Laffite, declaring that he had left St. Louis for Europe in June, arrives then after this congress. Engels puts himself to work, writing, stroke by stroke, two texts, a *Plan for a Profession of Communist Faith*, in response to the list of questions established by the Congress, and the *Principles of Communism*, based on a list of different questions that he, himself, had drawn up. In a letter to Marx of November 24, 1847, he alludes to this "profession of faith", explains that he is engaged in working on it, but that the catechistic form does not seem appropriate to him, and he suggests a new title, that of *Communist Manifesto*. This is the first time that this form appears in their correspondence, and we are then two months after the letter of September 29 in which Laffite speaks of the "manifesto". The second congress of the League of Communists meets then at the end of November-beginning of December in London. There, Marx and Engels make the proposition to replace the "Profession of faith" by a *Manifesto*, a proposal which will be adopted at the beginning of December. The congress entrusts the draft

of it to Marx who, being inspired by Engels' preliminary work, will deliver the text in February, 1848. In all of this, there does not appear in any part the title "Manifesto of the workers of the world" cited by Laffite, who, in view of the dates, was able to be conversant with the plan of the "Profession of communist faith", but was not able to read the text of the *Manifesto* which was not written when he returns to the United States. It is equally impossible that he had brought to the United States some samples of this *Manifesto*. For, he writes very clearly in the same letter: "I hope that Jean or Harry shows the manifesto to Mr. Joshua Speed and he in turn can show it to Mr. Lincoln" and I will bring several manuscripts and the manifesto". This is to say, that a slight shifting in the dates, some months, will make it possible for us to conclude that the *Journal* of Laffite is a forgery.

Another argument militates in this sense. If he had had discussions with Marx and Engels during the spring of 1847, after the meeting of the first congress of the Communist League, Laffite would have been struck by a stormy debate that had occupied this congress, a debate about some projects of Etienne Cabet. The latter wanted in effect to emigrate to the United States: since we are persecuted in France, he said, we go with "Icarie" and we create a colony founded on the principle of the commonality of wealth.<sup>13</sup> The United States had in effect attracted many utopians in the nineteenth century. Victor Considérant, for example, went to Texas to try to spread the ideas there of Fournier, and Cabet, the poet of "icarien communism", recaptured somewhat the same plan. But his ideas will be in a minority after a long debate, and in the first issue of the *Communist Review* (*Kommunistische Zeitschrift*) published in London in September, 1847, an entire article is consecrated to the refutation of the "emigration plan of citizen Cabet" One finds there a series of arguments to demonstrate that this plan is unrealizable. One among these deserves mention. The *Icariens* explains the anonymous author of this article, would all be as persecuted in America as they are Europe, and he continues: "That each one of those who want to go to America with Mr. Cabet begin by reading an account of the

persecutions to which the Mormons, a religious-communistic sect, were and are again exposed to over there..." Now, Laffite arrives from America, he goes and returns there, and it is unbelievable that he had not spoken of the Icarian proposals with Marx and Engels, unthinkable that these latter had not examined him on it. If he had retained only one thing about his contacts with the European communists, it would have been this.

Etienne Cabet will start for the United States in 1848, will sojourn in New Orleans, then in St. Louis, where he will die in 1856, in the city where Laffite resided! It is then unthinkable that Laffite, if he had participated in "numerous meetings" with Marx and Engels, if he had followed, even from afar, the Congress of the League of Communists, he did not speak in his *Journal* or in his letters of this utopian socialist who wanted to return to "his country of adoption", the United States.

We move on now to the money that he would have left to Marx and Engels, in keeping with the sense that he certainly has not financed the *Manifesto*, which was elsewhere published by the League of Communists and not by Marx and Engels with their own funds. One finds not one trace of this financial transaction in the correspondence of Marx and Engels. On September 28, 1847, Engels writes to Marx from Brussels (Marx left for some time in Germany). He does not speak of Laffite there, nor of donation, and the name of Laffite does not appear elsewhere in any part of the correspondence of the two men. This is to say that, even if Laffite had given the money to the two men, we do not have one trace of it.

Then, a forgery, the *Journal* of Jean Laffite? Very certainly, for the different reasons that we have exposed. But the principal mystery is, of course, the one that concerns the author of these different untruths. Who wrote the *Journal*? Who wrote the letters? Who wrote on the fly-leaf of the Bible, the pseudo-genealogy of Laffite? And why? The investigation brings us back now to the United States and to the presumed great grandson of Jean Laffite, John Andrechyne Laffite, whom I will call from now on Lafflin/Laffite. Robert Vogel, convinced that the *Journal* is a forgery, has given to the Rosenberg Library in Galveston

a manuscript of twelve typed pages in which he presents the state of his research.<sup>14</sup> He states there that John Andrechyne Lafflin, railroad retiree, made his appearance in New Orleans in the 1940s presenting himself as the great grandson of the pirate and that he succeeded in convincing the historian Stanley Clisby Arthur of it, author of *Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover*, and Jane Lucas de Grummond, Professor of Latin America History at the University of Baton-Rouge (author of *The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans*). But, thinks Vogel, all the documents produced by Lafflin/Laffite are false, and his arguments are not without interest. Here is a summary of some of them:

1) Ray Thompson, author of an article entitled *The Land of Laffite the Pirate*, who met Lafflin/Laffite many times, never succeeded in obtaining from him the slightest proof of his heredity nor to see his documents: he [Lafflin/Laffite] only produced some photographs. In fact, he appeared very much more interested in the documents that Thompson and other researchers could show him. Thompson suggested to him translating the *Journal*, but he refused. 2) In 1948, Lafflin/Laffite made a visit to Charles van Ravenswaay, Director of the Missouri Historical Society of St. Louis, and showed him photocopies of letters, pages from the family Bible and passages from the *Journal*. Van Ravenswaay checked the history of the St. Louis families implicated in the pseudo-genealogy of Laffite: nothing agreed. Lafflin had truly existed in Alton, and van Ravenswaay writes to Vogel: "The name that he chose is one of an historically well known Alton resident. It is easy to verify the information on his birth place and his life. I checked the era, and it is perfectly clear that the real man from Alton and the imaginary Laffite cannot have been the same". 3) Lafflin/Laffite showed Charles van Ravenswaay the picture to which I referred at the beginning of this chapter (it consists in fact of a board of reduced size, painted in a badly done fashion), signed Manuel de Franca (who had lived in St. Louis between 1845 and 1865).<sup>15</sup> It did not correspond in any way to the style of this painting, and the clothes of the persons were of a later fashion, from the years 1880-1890. Van Ravenswaay writes: "The man wears a *veste fendue* [French language

scholar Gene Marshall says this is a "split-tailed coat"], the woman, a feathered boa. These clothes were in fashion well after the period in which the portrait was supposed to have been painted. When I remarked to Mr. Laffite about this, he thanked me and declared that he would retouch the portrait..." Now, the reproductions of this picture published in Arthur's work and in the translation of the *Journal* are not the same: this is easy to check (I did it, for certain), and the picture has thus really been modified. 4) Lafflin/Laffite had, according to Vogel, spent many years traversing the United States researching in all the archival documents on his "great grandfather". He would have been seen many times in antiquarian shops in Kansas City buying old sheets of blank paper, and one can imagine that this paper went to serve him in his production of his forgeries.

This makes for many things, and I pass over the bewildering adventures of the Lafflin/Laffite documents, lost in a fire, recuperated in part, etc. Even the historian Stanley Arthur, who had, nevertheless, endorsed the authenticity of the *Journal*, seems to be posing some questions: In a letter of July 4, 1950 [Sam Houston Library, box 6, says Calvet], he remarks to J.A. Lafflin/Laffite that, according to the *Journal*, Jean is born in Port-au-Prince, whereas in 1813, before the Consul of France in New Orleans, he declares he is 32 years old and that he was born in Bordeaux. We do not have the answer, if it exists, but Arthur, who never had access to the collection of documents, has very certainly been misled.

All this affair then seems to be a forgery from A to Z. And yet, when Lafflin/Laffite died in 1970, in Columbia Hospital, South Carolina, his death is registered under the name of John Lafitte (it is necessary to note the difference in spelling), born June 4, 1893 in Nebraska. In the file "father's name" and "mother's name", "not known" was written. Furthermore, the death certificate indicates the Social Security number of this Lafitte (703-03-1367), his address at the time of death (3162 Bagnal Drive, Columbia), his profession (retired Missouri Pacific engineer), as well as the name of his wife (Lacie Surratt). The death certificate has all the appearances of an authentic document, the copy that I possess is certified to be identical. What then?

We enter then into another inquiry which consists in pointing out the connection of this authentic death with his [Lafflin/Laffite's] great grandfather. I have for sure been well employed in contacting the Church of Latter Day Saints, that is to say, the Mormons, who in Salt Lake City possess a great many genealogical documents. But, despite their reputation, they have not been of any use to me. In fact, somewhat paradoxically, the North American genealogies are the least effective; no civil state records exist in the United States before 1918. Furthermore, for what concerns Nebraska, the census of 1880 does not exist for families who had infants less than 10 years, and the one for 1890 is destroyed. Born in 1893 of a father, Léon Jean Lafflin/Laffite, who would have been, according to the *Journal*, born in 1865, our Lafflin/Laffite thus escapes us due to a documentary flaw, and the mystery persists.

It is not easy to take this type of inquiry elsewhere into the American governmental system. One is requested before all to give proof of your family connection with the person about whom you inquire. It has nevertheless seemed unusual that the number of American researchers studying "the Laffite case" have not undertaken this investigation. I thus wrote to the president of the Laffite Study Group, requesting if any one had taken up the genealogy of John Lafflin/Laffite. He did not respond, whereas beforehand he had kindly furnished me numerous documents. The Nebraska State Historical Society to which I addressed myself and who had consulted the available sources, declares itself "unable to find person requested". And the mystery lives on, even if everything seems to prove that the *Journal* is a forgery . . .

#### POST SCRIPT

In 2000, two years after publication of Mr. Calvet's book, Jean L. Epperson, Texas historian, author and genealogist, and long-time member of The Laffite Society in Galveston, Texas reached into an unexplored area of recently discovered records of the Railroad Retirement Board and United States Census Records to discover the true identity of the man calling himself John Andrechyne Laffite

(Lafflin/Laffite), alleged great grandson of the pirate Jean Laffite. According to Jean Epperson's article, "John A.", as he is commonly referred to by researchers, was born in Omaha, Nebraska, the son of John and Mary Matejka, Bohemian emigrants. Working for the Missouri Pacific Railroad in 1914, John had used the name "Nafsinger", stating later that this had been the name of his step-father. In April, 1947, Epperson states, John filed a "delayed birth certificate", claiming at that time that his name was John Andrechyne Lafitte [sic], son of Leon Jean Lafitte and of Mary Pauline Fontenelle, the latter of whom, according to Laffite Society researcher Dr. Reginald Wilson, no trace of documentation has been discovered to date.<sup>16</sup>

Although the mystery of John A.'s true identity has been solved thanks to dedicated research sleuth Jean L. Epperson, others still remain. Namely, 1) If a forgery, who, indeed, then wrote the controversial *Journal*, alleged to be the diary of the famous privateer-pirate Jean Laffite, written in French in his own hand? 2) Where did John Matejka (a.k.a. Lafflin/Laffite) acquire this document and the other items and documents included in the collection at the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center in Liberty, Texas? And, 3), perhaps the most unsolvable question of all: What motivated a simple railroad lineman to perpetrate such a bizarre hoax that fueled mind and imagination and drove him in search of acceptance and confirmation of an assumed identity for almost thirty years!? The legend of Jean Laffite endures, and now, perhaps, will that of John Matejka, a.k.a. John Andrechyne Lafitte.

D. Kariilanovic

#### END NOTES

1. Louis-Jean Calvet, Professor of Social-Linguistics, associated with the University of Provence in Aix - Marseille, France. He is the author of some twenty works. This article is a translation of excerpts from a

chapter in his book entitled *Le Dossier Laffite*, which Professor Calvet has granted permission to print.

2. Calvet's note: Record group 45, #108, office of naval records, Captains' letters.
3. The *Journal* states that Pierre's and Jean's wives, Françoise Sel and Christine Levine, and children lived in Port-au-Prince prior to the Haitian uprising in 1802-1803, hence there most likely would not have been marriage or birth records registered in New Orleans. Bertrand de Suduiraut, French genealogist found a "memoir worthy of belief issued from family archives" relating to the history of one Pierre Lafitte [sic].

This Pierre, born April 12, 1772 at Bordeaux, a former army captain in the Napoleonic campaign, had married a Basque woman, Sabine d'Amespil, December 29, 1793, at St. Jean-de-Luz, who bore him three daughters, names, birth dates some of which are on file. Some years later in about 1810, leaving his wife and children, he disappeared without a trace, appearing "a few years later" as a "*condottieri*" and "leader of mercenary soldiers" and "one of the chiefs taking possession of the island of Baratara". Suduiraut goes on to say that this Pierre Lafitte, "perfectly identified" in family records, may have been the one who married Françoise Sel, from whom issued a son, Charles Lafitte. If so, Suduiraut states, the marriage to Sel would have been illegitimate if it took place prior to 1821, the year in which Pierre's first wife, Sabine d'Amespil, had died. About 1838, Suduiraut says, a solicitor from the United States attempted to restore funds to the family of Pierre Lafitte, husband of Sabine d'Amespil, deposited by Pierre in "the banks of North America", indicating that this Pierre Lafitte apparently had died prior to 1838. Cf. Bertrand Guillot de Suduiraut, *Généalogie et Histoire de*

*la Caraïbe*, *Bulletin* No. 63, September, 1994, p. 1152.

4. Here, Calvet states, "Strange French. Stanley Arthur, author of *Gentleman Rover*, translates: 'Is going with me'. Did he fail to the contrary to understand that the voyage had already taken place?"
5. Author's brackets. [Unless otherwise noted, information in brackets is that of the translator.]
6. Author's brackets.
7. Calvet's note: "Arthur translates: 'Not to plunge into all America with the manifesto because there are others of the same kind for New York'."
8. Calvet's note: "He [Arthur] translates: 'I have agreed to the abuses'. Without a doubt it should read, 'J'ai dû couvrir the abuses'. ["I covered the abuses"].
9. Calvet states: "Arthur translates: 'and abandon to the *flambeau* [torch], which he puts in italics as if it deals with a proper noun. One for a boat? The date, March 3, 1821, seems to indicate that Laffite makes reference here to the time he left Galveston".
10. The phrase should read in correct French "*aux conférences*" instead of "*dans les conférences*". Also, no word "*débateur*" exists in French for this meaning.
11. Dates in French are written: "29 septembre 1847".
12. Gene Marshall, French scholar with a literary background and knowledge of French and Spanish, translated and published an analysis of the *Journal*, concluding that the unknown original translator(s) of the document may have had a knowledge of both French and Spanish as well as of English. Cf. Marshall, Gene, *The Memoirs of Jean Laffite: from "Le Journal of Jean Laffite"*, (1999), XLIBRIS Corp., ISBN 0-7388-1252-8, 193 pp.

13. "Icarie" from *Icarus*, Greek mythological figure who, flying too close to the sun, fell to earth. This term refers to a communistic utopia in *Voyage en Icarie* (1842), a novel by Etienne Cabet (died 1857), a French political radical who, together with other French emigrants, sought to establish a communistic settlement in the U.S. during the latter half of the nineteenth century. According to *Time*, the last Icarian utopia fizzled out in 1895.
14. Calvet's note: "Research summary, *The Journal of Jean Laffite*, by Robert C. Vogel".
15. Calvet's note here says that the painting can be seen in the Sam Houston Library in Liberty, Tx.
16. Jean L. Epperson, "Who Was John Andrechyne Laffite", *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, Vol. VI, No. 2, September, 2000.

## REMEMBERING THE LAFFITE STUDY GROUP

Robert C. Vogel

*[Society member, Robert C. Vogel, who started the Laffite Study Group agreed to begin the BIO project with an article on the original LSG. His excellent account below along with his previous "A Brief History of the Laffite Study Group, 1975-1990" (The Laffite Society Chronicles, vol. 4, no. 2, August, 1998) gives a good feel for the original group and its modus operandi. The Laffite Society is fortunate to have Robert, and other members of the LSG to bridge the gap between that group and the Society--Editor.]*

These anecdotal remarks are directed to what the current editor of *The Laffite Society Chronicles* has termed the "modus operandi" of the Laffite Study Group [LSG]. In my essay, "A Brief History of the Laffite Study Group, 1975-1990" (*The Laffite Society Chronicles*, vol. 4, no. 2, August, 1998), I set out to provide little more than a resume of the study group's major accomplishments. Over the years, I have been asked many times about the personalities of the core group of the LSG – DeGrummond, Howells, Warren, Holmes, Casey, et al.--and about the relations between the members of our little band of pirate-lorists. By preference, I should prefer to let the study group speak for themselves: after all, many of us are still among the living, and in any event the study group's archives contain a small mountain of letters, notes, cards, manuscripts, and various memorabilia. On second thought, however, I am moved to offer the following reminiscences as the first in what may become a series of short sketches of some of the Laffite Study Group's memorable characters and events.

The Laffite Study Group was originally conceived as a kind of dispersed roundtable where researchers could informally circulate their findings and interpretations. Our model was the symposium, the familiar forum for academic intercourse, but we were challenged by the fact that we were so widely dispersed geographically (see below). If the Internet had existed, we would no doubt have simply created a site on the World Wide Web, but in 1975 it was only practical for us to gather the various submitted essays and notes, type them up, and photocopy them for distribution through the mail. The loosely edited "occasional papers" were intended to generate correspondence amongst the researchers and any interested spectators,

and we looked forward to sharing as much of this commentary as possible. Being the junior colleague in the original study group, it fell to me to assemble and disseminate the papers. In order to provide the enterprise with some kind of structure, I somewhat pretentiously decided to publish our work under the title of *The Life and Times of Jean Laffite*, even though I do not think anyone envisioned our little band of Laffitists expanding beyond a dozen or so members.

The story has been told before, but it is probably worth recalling that the original members of the study group were John L. Howells, Jane Lucas DeGrummond, Harris Gaylord Warren, Sue Thompson, and myself. When the group formed in 1975, I had a brand-new B.A. in geography and American history from the University of Minnesota, where I had written a couple of papers on Jean Laffite that had somehow attracted the attention of Louisiana historians. At that time, John Howells was employed as an accountant with the Internal Revenue Service in Houston; Jane DeGrummond was still teaching history at Louisiana State University; Harris Warren was recently retired from university teaching and living in New Mexico; and journalist Sue Thompson was in semi-retirement in Gulfport, Mississippi. Several librarians and archivists, representing institutions as diverse as the Rosenberg Library and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, also had an early interest in the study group's work product.

An avid avocational historian with far-ranging interests, John Howells was married to the former Miss Jean LaFitte of New Orleans, a most charming lady who unfortunately passed away several years ago. When I first met him, John had the Laffite Journals collection on loan from his

friend Bill Simpson, and I was John's house guest in 1974 when I took the overnight Greyhound bus from Houston to Baton Rouge for my initial meeting with Jane DeGrummond. This remarkable woman was then coming to the end of her long teaching career at LSU, where she had received her doctorate in 1941. Her book, *The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans* (first published by the LSU Press in 1961), was then--and remains today--a must-read for students of Laffite and the War of 1812. Dr. DeGrummond took me under her wing and we became fast friends, as only a professor and a student can become when they are at different universities. Over lunch in the faculty dining room one fine spring day, Jane suggested that I contact Harris Gaylord Warren, author of the classic *The Sword Was Their Passport: A History of American Filibustering in the Mexican Revolution* [published by LSU in 1943 and reprinted in 1972] and numerous articles about the Laffite brothers. He had at one time taught at LSU. Dr. Warren had recently retired from the history department chairmanship at Miami of Ohio University but was still very active as a writer and lecturer. His response to my initial letter was enthusiastic and it was he who first broached the idea of a "Laffite round-table or symposium."

(Here, I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge the impact Drs. DeGrummond and Warren had on my professional career, to say nothing of my approach to studying Laffite, for it was due in large part to their generosity and encouragement that I abandoned all thoughts of a career in the law and struck out to make my living as an historian. Both were fine scholars and outstanding mentors and each had a vast network of colleagues, former students, contacts, and correspondents, many of whom were eventually drawn into the LSG.)

In the storage room in my home library, I have a banker's box filled with my correspondence with Sue Thompson (as well as other boxes stuffed with letters received and carbon copies of letters sent to Howells, DeGrummond, and Warren). Ray and Sue Thompson were well-known and respected Gulf Coast journalists, longtime friends of Lyle Saxon and co-authors of the wonderfully illustrated book, *The Land of*

*Lafitte the Pirate* (first released in 1943). When I knew them, Ray was too ill to be actively engaged, but Sue was ready, willing and able to join the emerging fight over the authenticity of the Laffite Journal. If memory serves, it was Sue who received the initial contact from a teenager attending junior college in Oklahoma, which brought Pamela Grunewald (Keyes) within the study group's orbit.

While the Laffite Study Group had officers and annual dues, and *The Life and Times of Jean Laffite* eventually metamorphosed from a collection of occasional papers into a quarterly newsletter with a circulation exceeding one hundred subscribers, there was never a general meeting of the group's members. This is not to say we were a shy group. For his part, Sir Jack Holmes presided over numerous *ad hoc* LSG gatherings, which were customarily held as after-hours adjuncts to the annual meeting of the Louisiana Historical Association. A particularly memorable gathering of the Laffitists occurred in March, 1982, when the LHA assembled in Lake Charles with an entire session on the program devoted to "Jean Laffite and Contraband Days: Southwestern Louisiana Folklore." The Laffite paper session, which drew a large audience as well as a surprising amount of media coverage, culminated in a three-days-long Laffite jam session at the home of then LHA president Dr. Tom Watson. For many years, our good friends John Howells in Houston and Bill Hyland in New Orleans served as hosts to a steady stream of itinerant Laffite researchers from the U.S. and overseas. A few hardy souls even made it up the Mississippi River to the Twin Cities. It was not uncommon for small parties of Laffitists to collect for drinks and dinner in New Orleans, St. Louis, New York, Austin, Paris, or Mexico City, and more often than not these little gatherings reverberated for years afterward in private letters and phone conversations.

In closing, it is worth noting that while many of the LSG stalwarts have passed away or moved on to pursue other interests, there are several study group members whose names appear on the rolls of the Laffite Society. It would be a mistake, however, to assume any kind of direct descent from the old LSG. Indeed, the society has much to recommend it over the study group, which from about 1980



onward could hardly claim to be a forum where members got their chief intellectual stimulus from one another. Study groupers were always of various minds as to the purpose and objectives of the LSG, and this uncertainty eventually caused the group's dissolution. Of course, the *Life and Times of Jean Laffite* was a far cry from the consistently well edited, attractively

formatted, and punctual *Laffite Society Chronicles*. This publication and the commitment to regular meetings in Galveston, occasional field trips to points along the Gulf, and diversity of membership make the Society a much more cohesive organization in which the members meet freely and easily. The Laffite Study Group is dead and gone--long live the Laffite Society!



## Biographical Sketch

### Pam Keyes

*[This series of biographical sketches (Bio Series) is started with a "bio" from Pam Keyes, former officer of the now defunct Laffite Study Group.]*

A native of Miami, Oklahoma, I was born in 1956 (nee Pamela Grunewald) and graduated from Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Ok., in 1978 with a BA in English/Journalism. I was a reporter for the *Miami News-Record* newspaper from 1979 to 1990, operated a portrait studio from 1992 to 2000, and currently do digital photo restorations as Pam Keyes Imaging, based from my home in Miami, Ok.

My fascination with Jean Laffite started when as a child I saw the 1958 movie "The Buccaneer" at a drive-in theater in 1965. The next day I went to the library determined to find out more about this

colorful person, and quickly learned there was no governor's daughter nor sunk *Corinthian*. The other parts which were true more than made up for those parts that were not true. I was particularly impressed that Laffite still helped the Americans after they blew up his home. When I found out just how crucial those Baratarians flint and powder supplies were to General Jackson's victory, I admired Laffite even more. I didn't seriously look into the Laffite story until a few years later, when I was about 16 and found a copy of Madelyn Kent's book *The Corsair*. I looked for more Laffite books finding Stanley Clisby Arthur's *Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover*, and was pretty much hooked on finding everything I could about



Laffite from then on. It's a compulsion that has lasted through three decades and shows no signs of ending, as I am confident there will always be new findings about this enigmatic, elusive smuggler/corsair.

In those pre-internet days I relied heavily on letters for research news since I didn't travel very far and was pretty much what is known as an "armchair historian". While in search of Laffite books I found Sue Thompson, wife of the author of *Land of Lafitte the Pirate*, and started up a lengthy correspondence with her. She in turn led me to Robert Vogel who was just then (1975) starting up a group called the Laffite Study Group. At the same time, in a

search for the Gros portrait of Laffite (the frontispiece for Arthur's book *Gentleman Rover*), I found John A. Laffite's widow, Lacy Surratt. Lacy led me to writer Audrey Lloyd of Midland, Texas. Vogel directed me to Dr. Jane de Grummond of Baton Rouge, La. and to John Howells, Houston. A long and varied correspondence about Laffite ensued, with Howells generously providing

hundreds of photocopies from his files. For a few years I was editor of the *Laffite Study Group Newsletter*.

In the 1980s I finally visited New Orleans and Baton Rouge, where I stayed with Dr. de Grummond and looked at items in the Special Collections Department at Louisiana State University. At New Orleans I met Lionel Bienvenue, then park historian for the new Jean Lafitte National Historical Park. I was a member of the citizen advisory group for the park's design. After the Laffite Study Group disbanded I did nothing regarding Laffite until Dr. Reginald Wilson wrote me regarding a new group, The Laffite Society, in January 1996. Since then I've done a lot of research about Laffite from original source material in newspapers, documents, etc., primarily at New Orleans.

The focus of my current research is the New Orleans Association, a group that masterminded several plots for takeovers in Florida, Cuba and Texas under the direction of New Orleans attorney Edward Livingston.

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## DESOTO PARISH, LOUISIANA LAFFITTES WERE

### REALLY BOUETS

Jean L. Epperson

Paul Bouet Laffitte, the progenitor of the numerous Laffitte families of today, was actually a Bouet. Historically names have been changed for many and various reasons. Paul Bouet likely became a Laffitte because a Spanish official recorded his surname then appended the maternal family name--as was their custom. One descendent claims the name was changed because Pauls mother's people were of royal descent and more prominent than the Bouets.<sup>1</sup> The children and descendents of Paul Laffitte Bouet accepted the name as it was recorded in St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches Catholic Church thereby using the patronymic Laffitte and not their Bouet surname. In modern times Paul and his progeny have been confused with the corsair Laffites with whom there is no known relationship.

Paul embarked from Bordeaux, France in September 1764 for Louisiana at the age of 18. He was born March 4, 1746 the son of Jean Francois Bouet and Marie de Laffitte. On the 16 of March 1746 he was baptized in the parish church St. Balize of Poury-Roqueloure, province of Gers, France. Marie the wife of Jean Francoise was the daughter of Pierre de Laffitte and Marguerite Espiat.<sup>2</sup>

Another historian has Paul departing from Bordeaux about 1760 for North America, arriving in Canada, then going to New Orleans, and on to Natchitoches, eventually settling at Bayou Pierre, DeSoto Parish.<sup>3</sup>

Paul made Bayou Pierre, now known as Carmel, his home and began trading with the Indians. He married Magdelaine the daughter of local trader, Alexis Grappe. They had four children. Much erroneous material has been written about their oldest son, Pierre Paul, born about 1772. After the death of Magdelaine, Paul married Eulalie Marie Anne the daughter of Manuel de Soto one of the earliest settlers of Bayou Pierre. Ten children were born of this union.<sup>4,5</sup>

In April 2003 a trip, to DeSoto Parish to view the environs of the Bouet Laffitte family, by Don and Sybil Marler and Jean L. Epperson proved very enjoyable and informative. Alice Prudhomme and Raymond Powell of Mansfield, Louisiana enthusiastically received them. Alice, secretary of the De Soto Historical Society and a descendent of Paul Bouet Laffitte, had corresponded with Epperson about an historical marker for Pierre the son of Paul Bouet Laffitte. The marker had ended up on an auction block and Alice retrieved it. Powell, a founding board member of the De Soto Historical Society, proved to be a wonderfully knowledgeable and welcoming guide for the visitors.

The highlight of the trip was a visit to Carmel, the home and burial place of Paul Bouet Laffitte and many of his children and their progeny. The cemetery and little white, wooden church were well kept. Just down the road a general store sign read, Laffitte Custom Millwork, L. C. The amiable proprietor was a Laffitte who served us cold drinks and said his son was buried in the cemetery. We were told that an archeological investigation is scheduled to begin soon on the home site of Paul.

The communities of DeSoto Parish are very much aware and prideful of their early history.

1. Beth Austin personal communication to Jean Epperson April, 15, 2003.
2. Katy Desoto and Laura Ewing, *Our Desoto Family* (Shreveport, LA : Self published, 1989).
3. Robert C. Vogel, "Paul Bouet Laffitte: A Borderlands Life," *East Texas Historical Association*, XLI (2003): 15.
4. Natchitoches Parish, LA, Clerk of the Court Records, Book 3, #642.
5. Jean L. Epperson, "The Laffitte Family of Bayou Pierre," *The Laffitte Chronicles* (July 1996): np.

Continued on page 18

## MAISON ROUGE SITE ON 2003 GALVESTON HISTORIC HOMES TOUR

Jeff Modzelewski

On the first two weekends of each May, the Historical Foundation of Galveston, Texas, holds a Historic Homes Tour. The owners of eight or ten historic restored homes open their residences for viewing to the public. The event has been held continuously for more than a quarter of a century, and it showcases interest in one of Galveston's greatest attractions: its large number of preserved late-nineteenth--and early-twentieth-century historic homes. It is a certainty that the annual Homes Tour attracts permanent residents to Galveston Island - my wife Kathy and I are living and breathing examples.

Often on these tours, a home that is not restored is included in the itinerary either as a "work in progress" or, if no restoration is anticipated or possible, simply for its historical value. The latter was the case of the purported site of Jean Laffite's Maison Rouge, the owners of which, Laffite Society founders Dale and Diane Olson, offered it for this spring's event.

Discussion of preparations at Laffite Society monthly meetings began last autumn when the group first learned that the site was accepted by the Galveston Historical Foundation as a stop on the tour. There was much to be done.

Extensive maintenance of the grounds was performed some weeks before the event, then again immediately prior to it, for weeds and brush grow quickly in Galveston's hot and humid springs, and litter also accumulates at a rapid pace. Large flags related to Laffite and his era, produced in full color with materials impervious to the weather, were commissioned, and the standards upon which to mount them were procured and

erected at the site before the tour. Some eight large placards were printed with text on different aspects of the Laffite lore and were displayed in the arches around the perimeter of the remaining structure.

A sampling of the artifacts unearthed in the archaeological digs conducted at the location in past years, now mounted for display with brief explanations, were arrayed on a table under an awning to protect them from the sun and possible inclement weather. Several of the common Laffite reference books, such as Jack C. Ramsay, Jr.'s *Jean Laffite, Prince of Pirates*, and Lyle Saxon's *Laffite the Pirate*, were displayed at another table along with some photographs and Laffite Society membership forms.

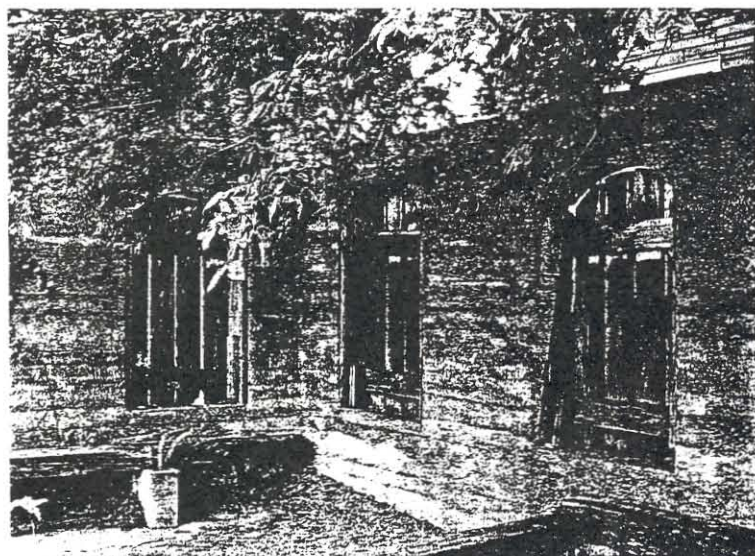
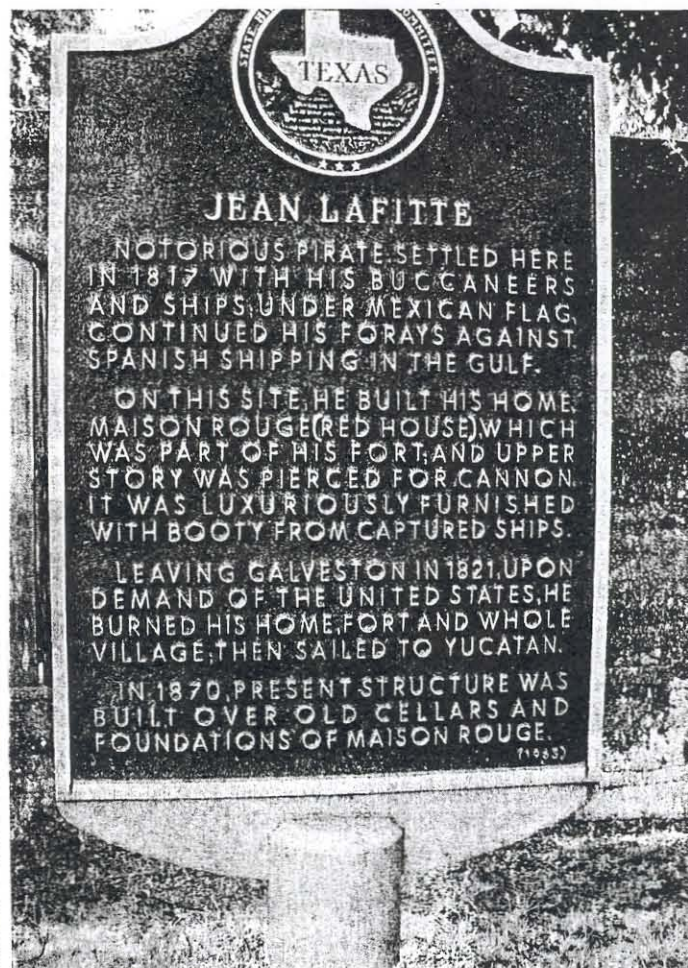
The event was good exposure for the Laffite Society. Total visitors for all four days numbered approximately 280. The Laffite Society thanks those who volunteered their time to the event: Michael Bailey, Jean Epperson, Mike and Jerry Eubank, Dorothy Karilanovic, Sheldon Kindall and some colleagues from the Houston Archaeological Society, Jeff and Kathy Modzelewski, John Moen, Dale and Diane Olson, David Pettus, Dave and Ginny Roberts, Norm and Margie Sachnik, Robert Vogel, and Chris Woolwine.

The Society did not gain any members from the event, but volunteers were able to increase their familiarity with, and knowledge of, the site through conversation with other volunteers more knowledgeable than they, and reinforced both this knowledge and their public speaking talents by leading small groups around the area. The placards and flags will be available for a long time to come for other Laffite Society events.



The Maison Rouge site is located at 1417 Ave A, Galveston, Texas. The structural remnants seen in the photos are of a 19<sup>th</sup> century home built over the original structure.

The photos were taken during the Historic Homes Tour by Laffite Society member, Dan Cote.



Interior View



Exterior View

## SMUGGLERS, SWAMPS, AND SAZERACS TOUR, 2003

By R. Dale Olson and Jeff Modzelewski

Since its inception in 1994, the Laffite Society has taken multiple "field trips" to New Orleans and other locales in Louisiana. The Crescent City is, therefore, rather well-known to Laffitians. Nevertheless, it was with excitement that members again planned to travel to the city of Jean and Pierre Laffite, Andrew Jackson, Edward Livingston, and John Grymes, beginning Thursday, June 19, 2003, for a four-day excursion. For the bulk of the Society contingent, whose origin would be Galveston, the trek to New Orleans would entail a one-way drive of some 345 miles.

The focal point of the trip was to be a walking tour of French Quarter sites with connections to the Laffites and renowned – or infamous! – Laffite author Lyle Saxon. The walking tour was to be researched, planned and led by Pam Keyes, but due to a rather serious automobile accident only weeks in advance, Pam was forced to cancel her travel plans. In an attempt to fill this void, Kathy Modzelewski began to develop a tour of her own. When Pam graciously offered her script *in absentia* as well, our group became the beneficiary of an expanded itinerary.

Laffite *aficionados* have little difficulty filling spare time in New Orleans, and with this in mind, Kathy purposefully avoided placing restrictions upon attendees that scheduling too many group events might have caused. However, as a happy medium, and still desiring to keep a Laffite focus to the out-of-town jaunt, Kathy planned two other group activities in addition to the walking tour.

The second group activity, scheduled for Friday evening, June 20, was dinner at the Pelican Club, an occurrence which is almost a tradition with Laffite Society excursions to New Orleans.

For the third planned activity, Kathy struck inspirational pay-dirt. She had wanted to arrange a swamp tour, available from a number of outfits in the country south of New Orleans. One outfit was headquartered in the town of Jean Laffite [formerly Laffite], and in making the arrangements, and while in chance communication with Society member Tom Halko in that town, Kathy discovered that the

Perrin Cemetery, featured in a photograph on page 119 of the Ray M. Thompson book *The Land of Laffite the Pirate*, was situated on land owned by Tom. The small cemetery was the mythical site of the graves of Jean Laffite, John Paul Jones, and Napoleon Bonaparte.

The result of the communication between Kathy and Tom led to nearly a full day's outing consisting of: a private talk and tour of the Perrin Cemetery with descendant Ed Perrin on Saturday morning, June 21; lunch nearby at Jan's Cajun Restaurant; and a swamp tour beginning at 2:00 p.m. with Captain Cyrus Blanchard of "Lil' Cajun Swamp Tours."

During the Laffite Society's regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, June 17, Kathy presented an overview of the trip, and early on the morning of Thursday, June 19, she, along with hubby Jeff, appeared at Dale and Diane Olson's home in Galveston to carpool to New Orleans. The only, and slight, apprehensions they shared were the possibility of rain in New Orleans, and the uncertainty of finding a Dairy Queen from which to order a Blizzard in Baton Rouge--a road of despair down which they had traveled several years earlier.

Counteracting the fear of these possible disappointments was the joy inherent in the semi-secret plan hatched by Jeff and Kathy to stop in Baton Rouge, locate the tomb of Lyle Saxon, and drink a toast to the author at his gravesite. Thanks to advance research by Kathy, the group located Magnolia Cemetery in Baton Rouge at 2:45 p.m. and entered through the North 19<sup>th</sup> Street entrance. In the absence of a caretaker or a map of the "residents," Kathy, Diane, Dale and Jeff fanned out in search of the gravesite of Lyle Saxon. Within about ten minutes, a holler from Dale announced that he had found it!

For future reference, the following are the directions to the grave. The cemetery comprises four quadrants with a covered gazebo-like structure at the center. Enter the cemetery through the 19<sup>th</sup> Street gate and proceed about 150 feet (perhaps about one-half the way) from that entrance toward the central gazebo. Look to the left, in Section 1,



and find the tombstone clearly marked "Cannon" just off, and facing, the road. The Saxon gravesite is immediately past the Cannon plot as one walks away from the road, but with the tombstones aligned perpendicularly to the Cannon marker and road, facing to the right as one walks toward them across the Cannon plot.

Lyle Saxon is buried in a plot of the Chambers family. Immediately next to him to the left lies Catherine Chambers Saxon (1868-1915), and on the right, Maude Chambers (1876-1960). On the far side of Catherine Chambers lies Elizabeth Chambers (1863-1951). Lyle Saxon's marker bears the elegant inscription, "Lyle Saxon, 1891-1946. For this honorable man we pay not our last respects, but offer instead, everlasting homage for his noble spirit which so enriched all our lives. Author-Writer-Philosopher."

Anticipating the successful ultimate discovery of the Saxon grave, Kathy and Jeff had prepared a batch of Sazeracs "to go" prior to leaving Galveston. The four now took photos, ruminated about who might have stood on the very same spot in 1946 mourning their friend Lyle's passing, and drank a mid-afternoon toast to the man whose work *Lafitte the Pirate* had inspired all of them. They also wondered how long it had been since Lyle had received visitors. A light rain began to fall and forced the termination of the visit. A small glass of Sazerac was left on the grave in remembrance of Saxon, and probably to the great joy of the transient lurking behind a huge oak tree, who had undoubtedly witnessed the bizarre ceremony!

By 3:15 p.m. the group was en route once more toward New Orleans under a densely black cloud. Rain fell but did not much impede progress. The storm was, they learned later, rather more severe in New Orleans itself, fifty-odd miles to the south, where an estimated six inches fell in a short period of time!

By 4:45 p.m. they had arrived at the hotel, the Le Richelieu, on the corner of Barracks and Chartres Streets. This was the first stay at this inn for a Society event; the hotel at which the Society has lodged most often is the St. Pierre, closer to Rampart Street. They unpacked, freshened up, and soon set up the traditional arrival wine-and-cheese repast in Jeff's and Kathy's suite. Soon, a quorum had assembled. Don and B.J. Peak, Ginny and Dave Roberts with daughter Barbara, Margie and Norm Sachnik, and Cindy Nobles all appeared, and

the field trip had officially begun. The group drank toasts to: recently departed Laffite Society member Richard Rasche, a fixture on past field trips; to Pam Keyes, for her work on the walking tour, which, due to her accident, she would have to enjoy at a future time; and to Reg and Betty Wilson, Dorothy McDonald Karilanic, Don and Sybil Marler, Jean Epperson, and other Laffite Society members traditionally in attendance on field trips but absent from this one. Late night found the group walking to the Café du Monde for coffee and beignets prior to retiring.

Friday morning, following breakfast at the patio restaurant of Le Richelieu, and an impromptu "Happy Birthday" toast to Jeff, the walking tour began, with Kathy, Diane and Dale leading the group with Pam's and Kathy's scripted explanations of the various sites. Kathy had printed and distributed a brochure of the entire tour for each attendee. Details of the walking tour will be published separately, but by way of overview, the group saw the following:

- the Ursuline Convent where Pierre was said to have sold slaves to the nuns in 1810;
- Casa Lalande, whose owner, Nicholas Louis de Lalande de Ferrieres, Vincent Gambi killed for his betrayal of Pierre to the authorities, which caused Pierre's imprisonment;
- the site of the Old Court House at which Jean Desfarges and Robert Johnson were tried and convicted of piracy;
- the house on the corner of Royal and Dumaine Streets, the only piece of property ever owned by the Laffites;
- the site of the birthplace of Renato Beluche;
- the Daniel Clark home where Jackson was entertained upon his arrival in New Orleans;
- the childhood home of Susanna Bosque, Governor Claiborne's third wife;
- the legendary home of Claiborne;
- the Pharmacie Dufillo;
- the Napoleon House;
- the home of Jean Blaque,
- the old U.S. Post Office;
- Madame Poree's home;
- the home of Lyle Saxon;
- the home of a Laffite treasure hunter, Dr. Deschamps; and
- Maspero's Exchange.



Rest and lunch were enjoyed at Café Maspero, after which members strolled and shopped the Vieux Carré for the remainder of the afternoon.

For nearly ten years, the Laffite Society has tried to dine as a group at the Pelican Club, in Exchange Alley off Rue Conti, at least once during each field trip to New Orleans, and this trip maintained that tradition. Not able to join the group until this Friday afternoon, June 20, were Dan and Jo Ann Cote from Galveston, who arrived after driving through rather severe rain between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. At 5:00 p.m. the group assembled in the hotel lobby and walked or drove the approximately ten or twelve blocks to the Pelican Club where, as usual, the fare was excellent. On Friday nights New Orleans comes alive, so all took their time returning to the hotel, some even spending a few hours at Harrah's Casino to attempt to get even with it for past indignities therein suffered!

At the Casino until midnight, and after a walk back to the hotel, Jeff and Dale shared a scotch on the rocks and sat up until 1:30 a.m. talking. It is often during these late night visits that some of the most interesting personal perspectives of the overall Laffite story emerge. The next day would bring about a change from the sophistication of the Vieux Carré with its beautiful restaurants and pricey antique stores. We were going to the swamp!

On Saturday, June 21, Society members again took breakfast at the hotel, and then car-pooled to the town of Jean Laffite. Member Tom Halko was to meet us and be our guide to the famous gravesite. After lunch, Captain Cyrus Blanchard would take us into the swamp.

The beautifully photographed book, *The Land of Lafitte the Pirate*, by Ray M. Thompson, was published in 1943 and presents excellent old black-and-white photographs of the lower Louisiana area taken by Eugene Delcroix. This book shows a picture of Mary Perrin, the wife of a descendant of one of Laffite's associates, standing near a gravesite near the town of Jean Laffite. According to legend, this grave contains the remains of John Paul Jones, Jean Laffite, and Napoleon Bonaparte.

A reception committee awaited Society members in the small settlement of Jean Laffite. Tom Halko, Ed Perrin, and several others had donuts, coffee, and fruit juices ready for a light post-breakfast/pre-lunch

snack. The old gravesite pictured in *The Land of Lafitte the Pirate* lay across a small parking area from the reception place, and, perhaps for the first time in sixty years, Laffite scholars gazed upon the grave which was said to hold the bodies of John Paul Jones, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Jean Laffite. We have all heard this legend for years, but Ed Perrin placed it into some sort of perspective.

According to Ed, Mary Perrin, his ancestor through marriage, believed as follows. Napoleon Bonaparte was actually rescued from exile on St. Helena by Jean Laffite, who left a double to confuse the English. Laffite was planning to take Napoleon back to Louisiana, but the former French general died en route. He was buried on the site in Jean Laffite. According to this same legend, John Paul Jones became bored with peace after his naval career, joined Laffite, and finally died aboard his own privateer. He was buried in the same place. Later, Jean Laffite was killed in a battle with a British ship and, before dying, gave orders to be taken back to the little town to be buried with his two friends, Bonaparte and Jones.

Mary Perrin started the myth with no documented, or even reasonable, support, and she was apparently the only one who believed the tale, while later descendants totally discounted her claims. The grave probably holds the remains of Manuel Perrin, Jr., the son of John Emmanuel Perrin, an associate of the Laffites. Manuel Perrin, Jr., was the great-grandfather of our guide, Ed Perrin. Mary Perrin had been married to Manuel Perrin's brother, so she was a distant aunt through marriage to Ed Perrin.

Ed Perrin explained the somewhat confusing geography of the Barataria region and told how the settlement of Laffite gained that single name in 1903 and, in the 1950s, became known as "Jean Laffite."

On the wall of the small reception house hung a well-executed drawing of two ships by A.C. Raymond. Tom Halko explained that Raymond was a French Canadian who came to the southern Louisiana area, lived in the New Orleans suburb of Algiers, and became interested in the history of Laffite. The drawing was labeled, "Lafitte being chased [sic] by American Brigg [sic] of war about 1821. Lafitte's ship was call [sic] *La Fierce* (*The Pride*). Capt. Jean Lafitte (1780-1826), Buccaneer.

May 19, 1989.” A.C. Raymond died several years ago.

Jan’s Cajun Restaurant was the planned site of lunch after the Perrin Cemetery tour, and everyone there enjoyed the typical seafood prevalent in the area.

The settlement of Jean Laffite lies across the Bayou from a small island which now houses new, expensive weekend homes. In the past, however, this area was the subject of one of the most widespread myths related to the privateer. In the 1950s, a court hearing was held to ascertain ownership of a strip of land for the mineral rights of which large oil companies were determined to owe royalties. Early ownership was traced to Francois Boutte. Descendants of Boutte, numbering in the thousands, were paid small yearly royalties. One legend holds that Boutte and Jean Laffite were the same individual. Therefore, many Boutte descendants throughout the United States incorrectly assumed they were in reality descended from Jean Laffite.

The irony of the story is that, although numerous people claim a relationship to Jean Laffite, Ed Perrin suggests that virtually no one in or around the settlement of Jean Laffite claims such descent! Even more ironic, no one except descendants of the Perrin family feel that their ancestors were in any way connected to the privateers. The myth continues, and it is one with which Laffite Society members are quite familiar. One of the most commonly appearing themes on the Laffite Society Internet site is that of individuals who think they are related to Laffite.

By 2:00 p.m. the group had driven the several miles to the dock of the “Lil Cajun Swamp Tours” and the home of Captain Cyrus Blanchard. Captain Blanchard’s ancestors have lived in the Barataria area since the late 1700s. Captain Cyrus’s boat was a modern, well-outfitted tour boat designed to accommodate perhaps sixty or so guests. The Captain is essentially an environmentalist, as evidenced by his deep concerns about erosion of the bayous, destruction of wildlife, and the noise pollution caused by those swamp tours using air boats. His knowledge of the intertwined bayous is extensive, and he was able to describe with precision the location of many structures

now gone, such as shipyards and oil company buildings, the victims of past hurricanes.

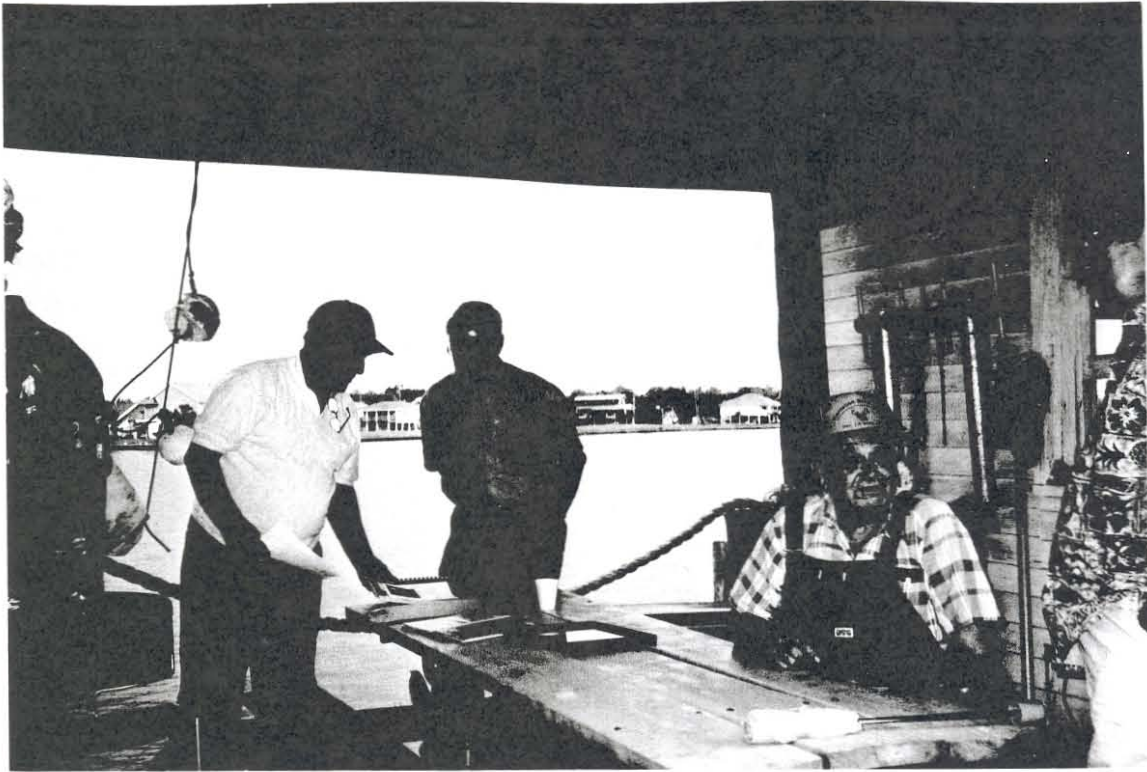
Captain Cyrus followed the current trend of throwing marshmallows into the swamp to attract the omnipresent alligators to the boat. Jeff wondered aloud if the evening swamp tours were treated to the sight of these same alligators giving themselves insulin injections on the banks of the bayou?

The light rain which had fallen during the visit to the Perrin gravesite and the drive to Captain Cyrus’s boat gave way to bright sunshine, and the afternoon was a first-hand show-and-tell lesson about the swamps of Louisiana.

Early evening found the group back in the hotel, having snacks and drinks, and recounting the events of the day. Replicating Lyle Saxon’s movements in such a situation, all strolled to the Café du Monde for coffee and beignets before retiring.

Some members attended church early Sunday morning, June 22, and resumed shopping trips before departing for their respective homes later in the day. The Olsons and Modzelewskis spent several hours at the French Market, at the bar back at the Le Richelieu Hotel, and at a bookstore out of the French Quarter, on Magazine St., and before they realized it, it was 6:00 p.m.! Thus they began their own journey back to Galveston rather later than planned. This leg of the trip was uneventful save for a significant delay between Lafayette and Lake Charles, where overnight road work had closed the interstate to one lane. Making several other pit stops for fuel, coffee, etc., the group arrived safely back in Galveston at about 1:30 a.m. on Monday, June 23.

As we have written before in these pages, field trips of the Laffite Society represent perhaps the highest level of camaraderie and exchange of Laffite-related information. Members become better acquainted and usually find themselves discussing the more esoteric issues related to the story of the Laffites, without the need to support their suppositions with documentation, and in a more informal environment than that of the monthly meetings. The trips are open forums during which all feel free to pose even the most basic questions about the Laffites.



Mr. Ed. Perrin, Norm Sachnik, unidentified local man and Dave Roberts.

Photo courtesy--Diane Olson



Lyle Saxon Gravestone--Magnolia Cemetery  
Baton Rouge, La.

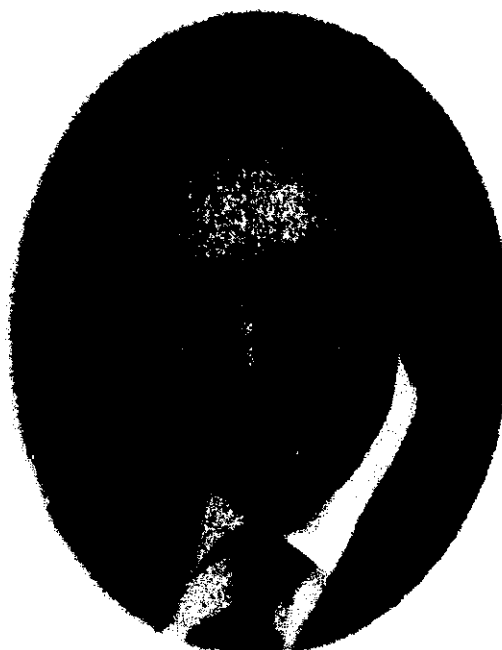
Note the Sazeracs left in memoriam.

Photo courtesy--Diane Olson

## Richard R. Rasche

April 20, 1916 –  
May 6, 2003

### *In Memoriam*



*by Jeff Modzelewski*

On Tuesday, May 6, 2003, the Laffite Society lost a long-time member, its former Archivist, and that proverbial “real character,” when Richard R. Rasche passed away at the age of 87.

Dick will always be a part of my earliest memory of the Laffite Society. My wife, Kathy, and I first heard of the organization in the late summer of 1995, when founders Dale and Diane Olson opened the purported site of Laffite’s Maison Rouge, a property which they own, to the public for a few hours one evening.

Dale and Diane had placed an advertisement in the *Galveston County Daily News* with directions to the site, and as we pulled up to park on 14<sup>th</sup> Street between the Strand and Harborside Drive, so did Dick. The three of us walked together from our cars into the front entrance of the property. I do not specifically recall if Dick was wearing his trademark cap that evening, but I like to think that he was.

The following is excerpted and paraphrased from the obituary of

Thursday, May 8, 2003, in the *Galveston County Daily News*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard R. Rasche was born in Urichsville, Ohio, on April 20, 1916. He graduated from New Philadelphia High School and attended Wooster College and Ohio University.

In 1942 Dick served in the Army Air Corps as a weather observer in Augusta, Georgia, and after leaving the military he worked for the U.S. Weather Service in numerous locations in the South Pacific. He also performed atmospheric observations for the U.S. Coast Guard.

Leaving the weather business, Dick returned to New Philadelphia, Ohio, for a time, to assist in the family’s landscaping business. He eventually chose library science as a career. He graduated summa cum laude from Arizona State University and obtained his Master of Library Science from the University of Illinois, where he held the Katherine Sharp Fellowship.

Dick worked for nine years at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. He then worked as the Curator and Rare Book

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AUGUST 2002-JULY 2004

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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   |
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