

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JEAN LAFFITE

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Laffite Study Group

The Laffite Study Group

The Laffite Study Group was formed during the latter part of 1975 to encourage and assist research concerning Jean Laffite's role in American history, folklore, and literature. The Life and Times of Jean Laffite, the official publication of the LSG, will be published twice annually, in January and in July. LTJL is devoted to historical articles, documents, and research notes; contributions of other materials, relating to Jean Laffite fiction, legends, &c., are also most welcome.

Contributors are reminded that their articles will be read by an audience of widely varied backgrounds. Manuscripts should be typewritten and double-spaced, with footnotes at the end of the article and also double-spaced. Address manuscripts to the Editor, Robert C. Vogel, 1775 Jefferson Avenue, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55105. The editors of LTJL reserve the right to make minor corrections and adjustments in manuscripts accepted for publication; proofs will be submitted to authors before going to press. No payment will be made for any material published. The editors and the Laffite Study Group disclaim responsibility for statements, whether of fact or opinion, made by contributors.

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Robert C. Vogel, Editor

The Journals of Jean Laffite

By John L. Howells

The original manuscript memoir and family papers of Jean Laffite are preserved in the private collection of William D. Simpson, of Houston, Texas. Mr. Simpson, proprietor of the William Simpson Galleries, Inc., acquired the Laffite Papers from descendent John A. Laffite in 1969.

This unique manuscript collection consists of two large, leather-bound journal memoirs written by Jean Laffite between 1845 and 1850, two French bibles filled with genealogical entries pertaining to several generations of Laffites, and a number of small "journals," notebooks and ledgers. Also included in the Laffite Papers are several daguerreotypes of Jean Laffite and his family, photographs of documents no longer in the collection, and the Stanley Clisby Arthur Portfolio (photostats of other important documents related to Laffite). Mr. Arthur's biography of Laffite, Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover (New Orleans: Harmanson, 1952), is based partly on information and some documents received from John A. Laffite. (Arthur did not have the Laffite memoir in his possession while writing the Gentleman Rover book. Madeleine Fabiola Kent, author of the "biographical novel" The Corsair (Garden City, Doubleday and Co., 1952), did have access to a Laffite memoir journal owned by Mr. Laffite). One of the large journal books has been

translated into English, and was published by Mr. Laffite under the Title, The Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story (New York: Vantage Press, 1958).

John Andrechyne Laffite inherited the Laffite papers (hereafter referred to as the Journals of Jean Laffite) from his grandfather, Jules Jean Laffite,¹ in 1924, but did not make the papers known to historians until more than twenty years later. By his own account, Mr. Laffite, who could not read French, never knew what his great-grandfather's journals contained until he showed them to historical Arthur in New Orleans. Having authenticated his claim to being the great grandson of the famous privateer-patriot, Laffite traveled extensively and consequently became extremely well versed in Laffite history and folklore; he tracked down Laffite documents in New Orleans, Galveston, Austin, Washington, and other U.S. cities, and claimed to have carried on the search as far away as Havana, Mexico City, and Seville. Over the years he was able to assemble a large collection of Laffite documents in photostat; unfortunately, most of these were destroyed by fire in 1959.²

The Journal of Jean Laffite is a translation made from a 249 page French manuscript contained in a leather-bound book measuring 8½ x 13 x 1½ inches. This "journal" was originally a blank book and has printed advertisements for the Laflin Gun

Powder Company on the first and last pages. There are two paintings inside the front and back covers, one of Matthew Laflin, the other unidentified but with the dates "1785-1828." The first page of the Journal carries a handwritten inscription in English from Matthew Laflin to "John Laffitte, Esq.", dated Charleston, South Carolina, 23 August, 1835. All of the entries made by Jean Laffite in this journal are in French. Clippings from several contemporary newspapers are found interspersed throughout the memoir; these do not appear in the published Journal.

The translators ³ of the Journal were called upon to use a certain amount of literary license in their rendering of Laffite's autobiography into English because of the author's archaic French and frequently confusing phraseology. For example: in his inventory of men and supplies furnished Jackson's army at New Orleans, Laffite lists such items as 6,400 kilos de poudre, 1720 kgs de pierres a fusil and 800 hommes au feu. In the translation, poudre and pierres a fusil become "gunpowder" and "gunflints", respectively, while hommes au feu (literally "men of fire") is rendered "men in the Army." Jean Laffite's spelling and punctuation also leave something to be desired, although his French is very good, indicating some kind of formal education. There is no chronology to the memoir; in places it is garbled, the account wandering, jump-

ing back and forth to different times and places. The translation retains these ambiguities.

The other large journal was also blank when Jean Laffite got it; it has the same dimensions as the memoir journal described above. It is not entirely filled in and contains a number of passages in English written by the children of Pierre Laffite. The French portions of this journal remain untranslated and there are no plans for publication.

The two family Bibles were published in 1820 and 1832; they measure roughly 4 x 7 x 2½ and 5 x 8 x 2½ inches respectively. These Bibles contain many pages of genealogical information, dates and places of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths. The Saints Bible (New York: Societe Biblique Americaine, 1820) is best known because of the oft-quoted "en secret" inscription on the frontpiece from Jean Laffite to his beloved Emma Mortimore.

Included among the small "journals" in the Simpson collection are two slender volumes of prose and poetry kept by the Laffite children. One of these "prose and poetry books," evidently owned by Laffite's son, Jules, has some entries written in French signed "Jn Laffite" and lines of verse from the pens of Matthew Laflin, Edward Eugene Laffite, and others. In addition to the Laffite passages there are short compositions by several prominent persons; most conspicuous are those of Wade Hampton (1831), David Crockett (1835), and Andrew

Jackson (1839).⁴ Jules Laffite's prose and poetry book has about sixty pages and measures 5 x 7½ x 1 inches.

The other prose and poetry book, inscribed by Jean Laffite in Charleston in 1850, was kept by the privateer's niece, Denise Laffite Little. Like Jules' book, this small notebook is mostly poetry, with signed compositions by Lois Ann and Denise Little, Charles, Eunice, and Eugene Laffite, in addition to many anonymous entries. It has forty-six manuscript pages and is slightly larger than the Jules Laffite prose and poetry book above. Neither of these remarkable little books have been published. The Jean Laffite material in them has not received the attention of competent translators.

Another of these minor journals is a ledger, filled with the names and dates of service of several hundred Laffite associates, agents, ship captains, &c. There is also a list, eleven pages long, of ships captured by the Laffite brothers and captains employed by them; a tally shows 71 prizes for Pierre and Jean (37 Spanish, 24 English, and 8 of other nationalities) and another 35 for "Oncle" Rene Beluche and brother Alexandre Frederick (alias Dominique You). There are no plans for publishing any of the notebooks, ledgers, and small journals presently owned by Mr. Simpson.

When he purchased the Journals of Jean Laffite, Mr. Simpson obtained a number of miscellaneous documents from the Laffite family papers. These include a remarkable group of

letters from Jean Laffite's private correspondence: letters written to and received from such famous men as Wade Hampton, Manuel Lisa, Joseph Robidoux, and Abraham Lincoln.⁵ There are letters from Jean Laffite to his family, written during his trip to Europe in 1845, describing his meetings with socialist philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Taken as a whole, these documents offer important insight into the character of one of American history's greatest enigmas. Unfortunately, only a handful of these letters have been published; Arthur's Jean Laffite, Gentlemen Rover has facsimile reproductions of a small part of this correspondence.⁶

William Simpson accepts the Laffite Journal as genuine from the purely physical standpoint that the paper and ink are of the correct age, i.e., more than one hundred and thirty years old. This judgment is backed up by a preponderance of evidence favoring the Journal's authenticity which, in his opinion, outweighs some negative aspects and circumstances connected with the John A. Laffite collection.

As a professional documents dealer, Bill Simpson has many ways of detecting fakes, learned from handling more than 100,000 old manuscripts over more than twenty years. The physical appearance of the Jean Laffite memoir cannot be duplicated, either by using brown ink or any other forger's concoction; the paper itself is of the heavy linen-base type used only up until the middle of the nineteenth century,

when the acid-treated linen-pulp paper in use today was developed. The ferrous ink used by Jean Laffite has actually rusted, causing the words to rise slightly above the paper; the iron oxide has permeated the paper, leaving an indelible imprint that will not wash out. (A drastic test of an old manuscript's genuineness is to simply wash it: forged handwriting dissolves from the surface of old linen paper, and pulp paper quickly disintegrates.) Test with chemicals, and heat have failed to duplicate this phenomenon. Samples, allegedly taken from the Laffite Journal, were certified authentic in age by the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress⁷ and an independent testing laboratory.⁸

Richard Santos, Bexar County Archivist in San Antonio, Texas, examined the Journals of Jean Laffite in July, 1969, just before their sale to Mr. Simpson. Mr. Santos reported finding many hitherto unknown facts in the memoir, which he described in a letter to William Simpson dated 7 July, 1969.⁹ By inference, the Bexar County Archivist pronounced the Jean Laffite collection authentic.

Mr. Ralph O. Queen, a nationally recognized handwriting expert, examined the Laffite Journal manuscript on several occasions during the summer of 1974. Mr. Queen, now retired and living at the resort community of Leander, Texas, has impressive credentials: more than forty years' experience in criminal investigation and handwriting identification for

the Houston Police Department, the State of Texas, and the Federal Government. He is also a member of the International Association for Identification, an organization whose membership is limited to persons with extensive legal experience in detecting forgeries.

Two pages from the memoir manuscript were removed at random. (The entries dated 7 October, 1846, and 24 September, 1849, both signed by Jean Laffite.) The handwriting in the memoir was then subjected to intensive study and a handwriting comparison was made, using other Jean Laffite manuscripts which are generally accepted as authentic. The three authentic Laffite documents used by Mr. Queen in his analysis of the Laffite memoir were the so-called "Le Brave Document", dated 18 August, 1819,¹⁰ Jean Laffite's letter to Gen. James "Yong," dated 7 July, 1819,¹¹ and Laffite's letter to Gen. James Long, dated 30 September, 1819.¹²

Mr. Queen found that the handwriting in Jean Laffite's Journal not only has the same outward appearance of the genuine Laffite manuscripts, but upon microscopic examination was found to have identical characteristics of letter formation. Forgers' attempts at handwriting duplication are best detected by enlarging selected letters in the suspect document three times their original size, then making comparisons with enlargements made from authentic manuscripts. Mr. Queen applied this process to the Laffite Journal and discovered that

although more than twenty years had elapsed between the writing of the Le Brave Document and the Laffite memoir, there was no appreciable change in letter formation, slant, or even pen direction. It is Mr. Queen's opinion that the Laffite Journal, the Le Brave Document, and the Laffite letters in the Lamar Papers were all from the pen of the same man.¹³

In conclusion, it should be noted that despite its shortcomings, The Journal of Jean Laffite is an extremely important and useful primary source, the only known account of Jean Laffite's life in his own words. On the basis of the manuscripts' physical appearance, and the wealth of historical information contained in many of the documents, the consensus among historians is that the Journals of Jean Laffite are authentic. Regarding the future of the collection, it is hoped that the memoir will be subjected to a more competent translation and careful editing under the guidance of an historian thoroughly familiar with the life and times of Jean Laffite.

Notes

¹ Jules Jean Laffite (1834-1924) was the eldest son of Jean Laffite and Emma Hortense Mortimore. John Andrechyne Laffite (1893-1970) lived in Jules Laffite's home following the death of his father, Leon Jean Laffite (1865-1898), a victim of a blast furnace accident. Laffite Bible, "Registre de Famille," William Simpson Journals of Jean Laffite Collection.

- 2 More of Mr. Laffite's family papers were lost in another fire, occurring on the night of 16-17 May, 1960, at the offices of WSPA-TV in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Spartanburg Herald, Tuesday, 17 May, 1960.
- 3 "I . . . had the journal translated by six different translators in Kansas City, Mo., and Omaha, Neb., time occupied from April 4th 1957 up to Sept. 10th, 1957. . ." John A. Laffite to Ray Thompson (author of The Land of Laffite the Pirate (New Orleans: Jefferson Parish Yearly Review, 1943)), Pacolet, S.C., 5 February, 1962. (Copy in possession of the author.)
- 4 The Crockett and Jackson items are actually short poems.
- 5 The two Abraham Lincoln letters, dated New Salem, Illinois, 21 December, 1835, and Washington, 11 November, 1847, are addressed to John Mortimore of St. Louis, Jean Laffite's brother-in-law.
- 6 Arthur, pp. 230-231, 244-245, 247-250, 253, 263-264, 268, 270.
- 7 David C. Mearns (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) to Mr. _____ (Laffite?), Washington, 5 September, 1956. (Copy in possession of the author.)
- 8 L. E. Harris (Director, Harris Laboratories, Inc.) to Lula Surrat, Lincoln, Nebraska, 2 June, 1955. (Copy in possession of the author.)
- 10 The "Le Brave Document" is a four-page manuscript signed by Jean Laffite, dated Galveston, 18 August, 1819. The document itself is an agreement between Laffite and the captain of the Mexican corsair El Bravo, Jean Desfarges, concerning the division of spoils. The document was taken from the Bravo when the schooner was captured by the U. S. Revenue Cutter Alabama on 30 August, 1819. The crew was tried for piracy in New Orleans; Desfarges and his mate were eventually hung, but the others were spared the gallows by order of President Monroe. Original in Federal Records Center, Fort Worth, Texas, in the archives of the U. S. District Court, New Orleans, Case Number 1440, styled "United States vs John Desfarges, et. al." (1819). See Arthur, pp. 194-201, for facsimile reproduction and an English translation.
- 11 Document Number 19 in the Mirabeau B. Lamar Papers, Texas Archives (Austin). It is generally believed that "Gen. Yong" was actually General James Long, an American filibuster who invaded Texas twice in 1819-1821.

12 Document Number 24 in the Lamar Papers. For English translation of Documents 19 and 24, see Charles Adams Gulick and Harriet Smither (ed.), The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1921), Vol. I, pp. 30-32, 34.

13 Ralph O. Queen to the author, Leander, 27 September, 1974. See also John L. Howells, "Handwriting Analysis of the Journal of Jean Laffite," an unpublished essay in the archives of the Rosenberg Library, Galveston.

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(To be continued.)

Documents

The Dispersal of Privateers and Smugglers at Barataria

Edited by Robert C. Vogel

Letter of Colonel George T. Ross, commanding the U. S. 44th Inf. Regiment, to Acting Secretary of War James Monroe, concerning the expedition to Barataria. New Orleans, 3 October, 1814. (Original MS in National Archives, Record Group 107: Letters Received by the Secretary of War.)

New Orleans October 3d, 1814

Sir:

In consequence of the enclosed letter marked A. an interview took place between Commodore Patterson & myself, and arrangements were made to put the Governors request into execution Notifying Major General Jackson of the intended Movement. In the beginning of September--The Papers marked B. C. D. & E. were sent [to] his Excellency [Governor Claiborne] & by him laid before a Council of War, Composed of his staff; the Officers Commanding Posts of the Army, Commodore Patterson & Major Carmick of the

Marines & tended to hasten our Departure
The Gun boats being on Duty to the East-
ward detained us until the 11 September
at One in the Morning when with a
Detachment of Seventy of my regiment I
embarked (the Governor having requested
my personal services) on board of Gun
Barges prepared for the occasion by
Commodore Patterson and dropped down
the river arriving at the English turn
Barracks by Sunrise Thus passing the City
and Suburbs without being observed On
the Night of the 15th, we arrived at the
Balize & [on] the 15th in the morning
we embarked on board the Gun Vessels,
reascended the Mississippi to the South
West Pass Crossed the Bar and on the
morning of the 16th, stood in for the
harbor of grand Terre The Vessels of
Lafite the Pirate, then plainly in view
formed in line of Battle [and] awaited
our approach as tho in some confusion as
our appearance was the first intimation
they had of our intentions The Gun
Vessels on board of which were the

Commodore & myself both grounded on going
in [over the bar] we however immediately
took to our Barges The other four Gun
Vessels with the Small schooner the Sea
Horse & two Gun barges, with a Ships Cutter
continuing their Course as was ordered in
the event of any of the Vessels grounding in
Crossing the Bar The Enemy suddenly broke
& fled in all directions across the lake

[Barataria Bay] , cutting loose some &
firing others of their fleet The [sic]
were pursued by such boats as could be even
brought within Cannon Shot who succeeded in
saving a fine Schooner with a Twelve pounder
& four smaler pieces fired by the Enemy

The Gallantry of Lt Jones of the Navy
affected this, who boarded after the Vessels
had been a long time on fire. The fore
shrouds & foresail [were] burnt & black
around the fore Mast.

Lt Gordon of the 44th Inf & Purser Shields
[of the Navy] distinguished themselves in
the pursuit of Mr Shields it is not my pro-
vince to Speak The Commodore will No doubt
do him justice but as it respects Mr Gordon,

I am proud in saying he belongs to my regiment He is a Young Gentleman of Military promise.

Many Prisoners have been taken some of Consequence who have been delivered over to the Laws of the Country which they have been offending by outrageous acts of Piracy and generally believed of horrible Murdering in as much as we Never hear of the Crews of the Vessels taken by them.

After burning all the Establishments, Telegraphs &c along the Coast of this Band, repairing the Vessels taken except those we were obliged to burn to wit an unrigged Brig & two Schooners aground [after] possessing ourselves of their Merchandise to as great an extent as time would allow [illegible] with our Prises eight in Number proceeded to Sea, entered [the Mississippi] by the South west Pass and on the first October in the Evening anchored the whole fleet opposite this city.

I Cannot but congratulate this Nation on the acquisition of this Fleet the injury is done not only to Lafite but is a loss to our

British Enemy whose propositions the enclosures B. C. D. & E. will explain & the Paper marked F. shows Lafites acceptation [The enclosures are presumably copies of the documents Jean Laffite delivered to the government through Jean Blanque concerning the British offer to the Baratarians. Since these documents, now in the Bibliotheca Parsoniana, have been published in several different places, they are not reproduced here.] This may be turned the First Enterprise of the 44th & from the Conduct of the Officers & Men I presage a Valuable regiment to my Country I am now Four Hundred strong a part of which is under the Command of Captain Baker with Major General Jackson.

The final paragraph, dealing with the internal affairs of the 44th Regiment, has been deleted.

With Respect

I have the Honor

To be Sir

Yr Ob Serv.

(signed) Geo: T. Ross

Col. 44th

To the Hnble

James Monroe

acting as Secty of War

* * * * *

Letter of Master Commandant Daniel T. Patterson, commandant of the U. S. Naval Station at New Orleans, to Secretary of the Navy William Jones, describing the raid on Barataria and the capture of the privateer General Bolivar. New Orleans, 10 October, 1814, (Original MS in National Archives, Record Group 45; Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy by Masters Commandant.)

Neworleans Oct. 10th, 1814

Sir,

I have the honor to inform you that I departed from this City on the 11th ult. accompanied by Colo. Ross, with a Detachment of Seventy of the 44th regiment of infantry -- on the 12th reached the schooner Carolina, at Plaquemaine and formed a junction with the Gun Vessels at the Balize on the 13th. Sailed from the south west pass on the evening of the 15th and at half past 8 A.M. on the 16th

made the island of Grand Terre (Barataria) and discovered a number of Vessels in the harbor, some of which shewed Carthaginian Colors; at 9 perceived the Pirates forming their vessels, ten in number, including Prizes, into a line of Battle near the entrance of the harbor and making every preparation to offer me Battle; at 10, wind light and variable, formed the order of Battle with the 6 Gun Vessels, viz. Nos. 5, 23, 156, 162, 163 and the Sea-Horse Tender, mounting one six pounder and fifteen men, and a Launch mounting one twelve pound carronade; the Schooner Carolina drawing too much water to cross the Bar; at half past 10 perceived several smokes along the Coast as Signals, & at the same time a white Flag hoisted on Board a Schooner, at the fore an American Flag at the main-mast head, and a Carthaginian Flag (under which the Pirates cruize) at her Topping lift; replied with a white Flag at my main; at 11 discovered that the Pirates had fired two of their best Schooners; hauled down my white Flag and made the signal for battle -- hoisting

whit it a large white Flag bearing the words "Pardon to Deserters", having heard there was a number from the army and navy there, who wished to return if assured Pardon, and which the President's proclamation offered till the 17th. At a quarter past 11 Gun-Vessels No. 23 and 156 (the latter bearing my pendant) grounded, and were passed agreeably to my previous order, by the other four which entered the harbor, manned my Barge and the boats belonging to the grounded Vessels, and proceeded in, when to my great disappointment I perceived that the Pirates had abandoned their Vessels, and were flying in Boats, in all directions. I immediately sent the Launch and two Gun Barges with small Boats in pursuit of them; at meridian took possession of all their Vessels in harbor, consisting of six Schooners and one Felucca, Cruizers and Prizes of the Pirates, one Brig, a Prize, and two armed Schooners of Battle, with the armed Vessels of the Pirates, and apparently with an intention to aid them in any resistance they might make against

me, as their crews were at quarters, tomptions out of their guns, and matches lighted. Colo Ross at the same time landed, and with his command took possession of their establishments on the shore, consisting of about forty houses of different sizes, badly constructed and thatched with Palmetto leaves.

When I perceived the enemy forming their vessels into a line of Battle, I felt confident from their number and very advantageous position; and their number of men, that they would have fought me; their not doing so I regret; for had they, I should have been enabled more effectually to destroy or make Prisoners of them and their leaders; but it is a subject of great satisfaction to me, to have effected the object of my enterprize, viz Capturing all their Vessels in Port, and dispersing the band without having one of my brave fellows hurt.

The enemy had mounted on their vessels twenty pieces of cannon of different Calibers and, as I have since learnt, from 800 to 1000 men, of all nations and colors.

Early in the morning of the 20th, the Carolina at anchor, about five miles distant, made the Signal of a "Strange Sail in Sight to the Eastward," immediately after, she weighed anchor, and gave chase, the Strange Sail standing in for Grand Terre, with all sail; at half past 8 the chase hauling her wind off shore to escape; sent acting Lieut. Robert Spedden with four Boats manned and armed to prevent her passing the harbor; at 9 A.M. the chase fired upon the Carolina, which was returned; each Vessel continued firing during the chase, when their long guns could reach; at 10 the chase grounded outside the bar, at which time the Carolina was, from the Shoallness of the water, obliged to haul her wind off shore and give up the chase ; opened a fire upon the chase across the island from the Gun Vessels; at half past 10 she hauled down her Colors and was taken possession of by lieut Spedden; she proved to be the armed Schooner called the General Bolivar, under the Carthaginian Flag; by grounding she broke both her Rudder Pintles,

and made water; hove her off in the course of the day, and at day-light on the 21st sent out a small Prize Schooner to lighten her -- took from her armament, consisting of one long Brass 18 pds, one long brass 6 pds, two 12 pound carronades, small arms, &c, and twenty-one packages of dry goods, and brought her into Port; and as I could not wait for the repairs necessary for her rudder, ordered her to this port for adjudication. I am well convinced that she is one of the Vessels belonging to, or connected with, the Pirates, as signals of recognition for her were found on Board one of the Pirate's prizes, and at the time she was discovered, she was standing directly for Grand Terre which she still endeavored to gain, after being chased by the Carolina, not knowing of our being in possession of it, she fired Several Shots at the Carolina, after the latter had shown her colors.

On the afternoon of the 23rd got under way, with the whole squadron, in all Seventeen Vessels (but during the night one Schooner under Carthaginian Colors escaped)

on the morning of the 24th entered the South-West Pass of this River and on the 1st inst. arrived opposite this City with all my squadron.

The amount of the Prizes and Prize goods will probably be considerable; but at present cannot be ascertained.

Three of the Schooners are admirably adapted for the Public service on this station, being uncommonly fleet sailors and light draught of water, and would be of infinite Public Utility.

I cannot speak in too high terms of commendation of the good conduct of the Officers, seamen and marines whom I have the honor to command; nothing could exceed the zeal shewn by all on this occasion.

Great credit is due to Lieut Louis Alexis and Mr. Thomas Shields, Purser, for gallantly leading in, in the face of the enemy; the former in the Sea-Horse Tender, and the latter in the Launch, when they had every reason to believe the enemy would open their whole Battery upon them, supported by Gun Vessel No. 5, astern of them, commanded

by Mr. J. D. Ferris, Mr. Shields very handsomely volunteered his Services on this expedition, and has from his being a seaman rendered me great assistance in taking charge of and bringing one of the Prizes to this City.

Lieut Thomas A. C. Jones, particularly distinguished himself by boarding one of the Schooners which had been fired, and extinguishing the fire after it had made great progress; a quantity of powder being left in her open cabin, evidently designed to blow her up, he is also with Lieutenant Norris, and acting Lieut Thomas S. Cunningham, entitled to my thanks for the severe duty performed by them in open Boats for several days and nights.

Acting Lieut Spedden merits particular notice for the handsome manner in which he led the boats to cut off the General Bolivar, and afterwards bringing her into Port.

I am also greatly indebted to Lieut Alexis, acting Lieuts Spedden, M'Keever, sailing masters J. D. Ferris, George Ulrick and William Johnson, for their indefatigable

exertions in fitting the Prizes for sea; to acting Lieut M'Keever also, for his extreme attention to the duties devolving upon him from my Pendant being hoisted on Board [Gunboat] No. 23, under his command. I beg leave, sir, to seize this opportunity of recommending these officers to your particular notice, and to solicit a confirmation of their present rank for acting Lieuts Robert Spedden, Isaac M'Keever, and Thomas S. Cunningham.

It affords me great satisfaction to inform you that the most cordial co-operation of Colo. Ross, and the Detachment of his regiment, in every measure adopted or duty performed, the utmost harmony existing between the two Corps during the whole expedition, himself, Officers and men sharing in every enterprize, or arduous duty where their services could be useful.

Had it been possible for the Carolina to have entered the Harbor, or prudent to have drawn her officers & men from her when anchored in an open roadstead, and where I had every reason to expect the appearance of the enemy's

cruizers [i.e., the British], I should have derived great aid from Capt. Henley, his officers and crew, who all expressed the strongest desire to partake of our toils, and any danger there might be to encounter. I have no doubt the appearance of the Carolina in the squadron had great effect upon the Pirates.

I have the honor to be
with great consideration
and respect

Your Ob. Serv.

(Signed) Danl. T. Patterson

The Honble

W. Jones

Secretary of the navy

Washington City

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Book Review

Lafitte the Pirate. By Lyle Saxon. Illustrations by E. H. Suydam. (New Orleans; Robert L. Crager & Company, 1930. xiv, 307 pp. Foreword, bibliography.)

At the risk of sounding prejudiced we consider Lyle Saxon's Lafitte the Pirate to be the best book yet written about Louisiana's celebrated privateer. This is not to say that it is the last word on the subject of Laffite's biography; Lyle, were he alive, would be the first to admit that Lafitte the Pirate is not a definitive history of Jean Laffite's life. The complete story of Laffite has yet to be written, and some of Saxon's material is still being debated by historians.

Much fiction, in fact considerable trash, has been written about Jean Laffite. Throughout the mid-1800's he was the subject of literally hundreds of colorful, swashbuckling tales of piracy and romantic drivel. Ned Buntline and other "pot boiler" writers filled the magazines of the day with incredible stories about the famous "Pirate of the Gulf."

In our opinion, Lyle Saxon was the first writer to assemble all of the known historical facts about Laffite and turn them into an entertaining, readable book. He wrote only

about that part of Laffite's life that could be documented -- from the days of the blacksmith shop on Bourbon Street, around 1804, until the burning of Campeachy in 1821. A superb raconteur and gifted writer, he portrayed Laffite not as a blood-stained buccaneer, the terror of the Spanish Main, but as a gentleman smuggler and privateer of astute business acumen; tall, handsome, dignified, with the refined social graces of an aristocrat. Lyle's Jean Laffite comes across as a real, flesh and blood man, albiet one cloaked in mystery and legend -- a far cry from the mythical folk hero of the pulp journals or the vague, impregnable enigma of the encyclopedias.

Lyle was a close and personal friend and we know that Lafitte the Pirate, whatever its minor faults, was very well researched. Lyle used some of the finest libraries, archives, and private collections in the South. The book itself was written at Yucca House on Melrose Plantation (near Natchitoches, La.), birthplace of many of Lyle's greatest literary achievements. Here Lyle had, literally at his fingertips, one of the best private libraries in Louisiana, that of Mrs. Cammie G. Henry, owner of Melrose. He also had access to many old family papers, diaries, and scrapbooks retained by the descendants of some of Laffite's Creole contemporaries.

There are some who have brushed Saxon off as a "romantic"

writer, but we know that writing about history romantically does not necessarily diminish its value, providing the facts are there. Lyle was, of course, a newspaper reporter, not a novelist -- and while scholars may quibble over certain points in Lafitte the Pirate, everyone agrees that it is well written and based upon extensive research. Lyle possessed an intimate knowledge of the history and culture of Louisiana in general and Creole New Orleans in particular, and he wrote lovingly about the people and places portrayed in his books. And he wrote exceedingly well.

Privateer or pirate, patriot or brigand -- Jean Laffite was (and still is) "all things to all men." Who he really was, where he came from, and what became of him after he sailed away from the Texas coast -- these questions remain to be unraveled by today's historians.

Ray and Sue Thompson

News and Notes

From Pierre Larousse's Grand Dictionnaire Universel (1891), tome dixiem, p. 58, comes this intriguing biographical sketch of a French corsair named Nicolas Lafitte.

LAFITTE (Nicolas), fameux pirate francais, ne a Bordeaux en 1781; on ignore l'epoque de sa mort. Tout enfant, il servit dans la marine, fit partie du bataillon des marins de la garde, qu'il deserta en 1806, pour se soustraire a une condamnation capitale, passa en Amerique, ou il donna pendant quelque temps des lecons d'escrime, puis s'enrola parmi les corsaires qui parcouraient la mer des Antilles. Grace a son intrepidite, il devint bientot capitaine, s'enrichit par des prises, etablit son repaire dans l'ile de Barataria, a l'embouchure du Mississippi, et vendit en contrebande aux negociants de la Nouvelle-Orleans le butin qu'il ne cessait de faire. Le gouverneur de la Louisiane, qui n'avait presque plus de douanes a percevoir, mit a prix in tete de Lafitte et donna l'ordre a un detachement de soldats de s'emparer des etablissements de Barataria (1813); mais Lafitte fit prisonnier le detachement, qu'il rendit aussitot a la liberte. Toutefois, quelque temps apres, enveloppe par des forces superieures, le hardi pirate fut fait a son tour prisonnier avec ses hommes et conduit a la Nouvelle-Orleans. Il etait en prison dans cette ville, lorsque les Anglais vinrent attaquer les cotes de la Louisiane. Comme le general Jackson manquait d'hommes et d'artilleurs pour repousser cette attaque, Lafitte lui tit proposer de combattre l'ennemi, a la condition d'entre rendu a la liberte avec ses compagnons, Cette offre fut acceptee, et al general americain put, grace a ce secours, repousser les Anglais. Lafitte, devenu libre, reunit ses compagnons et les debris de sa fortune, puis alla s'etablir a Galveston. Mais la, ses captures furent moins riches et moins nombreuses, et il n'en put tirer un parti aussi avantageux qu'auparavant. Il n'en continua pas moins, toutefois, a envoyer aux cotes

de la Louisiane des bateaux charges d'objets precieux. Lafitte respecta toujours le pavle put, des services a ses compatriotes, mais, par contre, il avait voue aux Anglais une haine implacable. Il etait courageux, ruse, sobre, et so montra souvent humain et gener-eux.

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Mrs. Ray Thompson, of Gulfport, Miss., writes that in 1945 she purchased a set of Spanish silver coins that included a curious token-like coin, bronze, about the size of nickel, with the word LAFITTE stamped on the face. She showed it to a number of New Orleans numismatists over the years, none of whom could identify it. It was felt that the coin had originated with Jean Laffite's Baratarians. Unfortunately, Mrs. Thompson's coin collection, with her strange "token" was stolen in 1967.

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Pamela Grundewald, a student majoring in journalism at Northeastern A & M Junior College, Miami, Okla., is seeking information about the Jarvis painting of the Laffites and Dominique You, which used to hang in the Cabildo at New Orleans. It would appear that there is some doubt as to exactly where, when, and by whom the painting was done. Pam is also interested in the history of the marble bust of Jean Laffite at the Louisiana State Museum. Anyone with any

information relating to either the Jarvis painting or the bust is asked to write Ms. Grunewald at 1020 K Northwest, Miami, Oklahoma 74354.

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Fred Stielow, who is working on his doctorate at Indiana University, Bloomington, has completed a short monograph on the history of Grand Isle, La., in collaboration with Sally Evans and Betsy Swanson, to be released in March. The editor recently had the pleasure of reading Mr. Stielow's rough draft of the first chapter, dealing with the settlement in Laffite's day.

Betsy Swanson's regional history of Barataria, Historic Jefferson Parish: From Shore to Shore, is now available, published by the Pelican Press at Gretna, La. Laffite enthusiasts will possibly find Ms. Swanson's treatment of Jefferson Parish's most celebrated resident rather cursory; nevertheless, this attractive volume is beautifully illustrated with page after page of photographs, sketches, and maps, all of excellent quality.

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From the London Annual Register for 1814 (volume 50, page 194):

A British expedition was undertaken in the autumn in the gulf of Mexico, of which we have only some imperfect accounts through the medium of the American papers. From these it appears that Lieutenant-Colonel Nicholls, styling himself commandant of his Britannic Majesty's forces in the Floridas, issued a proclamation to the people of Louisiana, dated Pensacola, Aug. 29th., in which he stated himself to be at the head of a large army of Indians...seconded by the aid of a numerous British and Spanish squadron...and called upon the settlers in that province to contribute their aid in abolishing the American usurpation. He also addressed a letter to Mons. La Fete, or Fitte, a Frenchman, the chief of a band of outlaws or pirates...who has posted themselves in an island called Barataria... in which he acquainted La Fete with his arrival, and made him large offers for his assistance. We have no further direct information of the proceedings of Lieutenant-Colonel Nicholls...

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