CONTEMPORANEOUS DESCRIPTIONS OF JEAN LAFITTE

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Cruise of the Enterprise, in "A Day with
Jean Laffite is described by an officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise in 1819 as "a stout, rather gentlemanly personage, five feet ten inches in height, dressed very simply in a foraging cap and blue frock of a most villainous fit; his complexion, like most Creoles, olive; his countenance full, mild, and rather impressive, but for a small black eye which, now and then, as he grew animated in conversation, would flash in a way which impressed me with a notion that 'El Capitano' might be, when aroused, a very 'ugly customer.' He was evidently educated and gifted with no small talent for conversation."