Jean L. Epperson

Stanley Faye and Jean Laffite

Stanley Faye was a prolific researcher and writer about early nineteenth century pirates and privateers in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. He once wrote a nonfiction manuscript, *Privateers of the Gulf*, that he could not get published, so he tried to convert it to fiction. It was so loaded with historical facts and details that no publisher of fiction would print it. The main character was named John Laffite who confessed that he was a native Spaniard born in Orduna, Spain. A copy of the unpublished manuscript was given to Faye's friend, J. Frank Dobie, who scoffed at the idea that Laffite was portrayed as a Spaniard. Never published, the manuscript formed the basis for many scholarly articles published later in the *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, and ended up in the Center for American History at the University of Texas Libraries in Austin.

Oddly enough considering his intense interest in the Gulf and the Caribbean, Faye was not from the South. He was born July 31, 1886 in Aurora, Illinois, the son of a well known newspaper editor, Charles Montrose Faye, of the *Aurora Daily News* and the *Chicago Daily News*. His mother's family was also in the newspaper business. Uncle O. B. Knickerbocker was the first publisher of the *Weekly Aurora Beacon* when it was revived in 1857. Following in the footsteps of his family, Stanley became the historical editor of the *Beacon-News* in April 1947.

Educated at the University of Chicago and in France, Stanley began his working career as a reporter for the *Chicago Journal*. He was department editor and music critic on the *Chicago Daily News*, and assistant editor of the *Musical Leader*. Stanley was also a researcher and writer for various historical organizations, in Arkansas, Illinois, Florida and Louisiana. Some of the lengthy articles he wrote were intended to be books but discouraged by his first attempts to publish, he settled for publication in prestigious historical journals. As far as currently known none of his literary efforts were ever published in book form.

Thirteen articles were authored or edited by Stanley Faye for the *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Baton Rouge, between October 1939 and July 1944. Of the thirteen, the following were devoted to privateers and pirates:

2. “Types of Privateer Vessels, Their Armament and Their Flags in the Gulf of Mexico” Vol. 23 1940
3. “Privateers of Guadeloupe and Their Establishment in Barataria” Vol. 23 April 1940
5. “Commodore Aury” Vol. 24 July 1941

*Privateers of the Gulf* was finished in August 1928 by Faye and sent to prospective publishers. The four hundred twenty nine page manuscript exhibits a masterly understanding of the political machinations surrounding the issues and inner relations of the United States, France, Spain and England concerning trade and privateering in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. *Privateers*, first written as nonfiction, was rejected by publishers during the 1930s, frustrating Faye so that he decided to insert a chapter of fiction (Chapter 19) and style the prospective book fiction. This ploy didn’t help sell the manuscript either.

J. Frank Dobie, in Texas, was working on a manuscript for his forthcoming book, *Coronado's Children*, in which he planned to include a chapter on Jean Laffite. After reading an article in the *Yale Review* of 1928 about Jean Laffite, Dobie contacted Faye the author. A
correspondence and friendship developed between the two. Dobie's manuscript was published in 1931 but Faye still had not found a publisher.7

Discouraged with efforts to get the Privateers manuscript published, Faye sent a copy to J. Frank Dobie saying in a letter that Dobie would perhaps appreciate it.8 Mr. and Mrs. Dobie donated this copy to the Barker History Library on September 22, 1943. It is not known where the original manuscript is or even if it still exists.

Faye depicts John Lafitte in Privateers as the foremost citizen of New Orleans, the superior in intellect and ability to his elder brother Pierre. Twelve years later when The Great Stroke of Pierre Lafitte was published in the Louisiana Historical Quarterly, Pierre is depicted with the brains and the ability. Further research and critical thinking apparently reversed Faye's opinion of the brothers.

John Lafitte is the main character of Privateers and almost every chapter ends with a mention of him, but actually not a great deal of information is forthcoming about his life. One little known detail revealed that the Laffites told the Spanish in New Orleans that they were natives of Spain born in Orduna, in the Basque Provinces high in the Cantabrian Alps of a Spanish mother and a French father. They asked for pardons from the king for their crimes against the Spanish.9 Was this story true or did they tell their Spanish spy masters this in order to gain their confidence and extract information and money from them? Who knows, but it has been noted that even while Jean and Pierre were Spanish spies their ships were pillaging Spanish shipping. Jean had sworn in 1813 that he was 32 years old and was born in Bordeaux, France.10

Another interesting passage in Privateers on flags states that the flag of Cartagena was first flown by Dominique You on his schooner El Tigre off the pass of Nautle. An early flag of Mexico of blue and white checkerboard design was first utilized by Job Northrup sailing off the coast of Pensacola. This flag was designed by the Mexican Minister Juan Pablo Anaya. It was soon adopted by the Baratarians and flown at their mastheads. This information was accredited to Peter Ellis Bean.11

Stanley Faye died after a brief illness on March 6, 1949 in Aurora, Illinois at the home of a friend, Charles R. Sherman. He was only 62 years of age. A bachelor, he was survived by two nephews, Charles K. Faye, of San Francisco and Harold K. Faye of New York. Faye will be kindly remembered by scholars of nineteenth century Gulf and Caribbean pirate lore for his in-depth research, illuminating footnotes, and numerous and varied sources. Many of the sources were found in research libraries in the United States. Faye reminds us that pirate treasure troves are not always dug up in remote places.

Endnotes
1. The manuscript Privateers of the Gulf is being published in book form by Dogwood Press, Hemphill, Texas.
2. Stanley Faye to J. Frank Dobie, May 12, 1930, Marcel Maraud Papers, Sam Houston Regional Library, Liberty, Texas. Please note the varied spelling of Lafitte/Lafitte in the article. The buccaneer spelled his name Lafitte and Faye spelled his character's name Lafitte, therefore both spellings are used.
3. Stanley Faye, manuscripts and letters in the Center for American History, University of Texas Libraries, Austin, Texas. A copy of this manuscript was provided to the author through the courtesy of Ralph Elder, Assistant Archivist, and the University of Texas Libraries.
5. Ibid. Obituaries; Stanley Faye to J. Frank Dobie, January 16, 1929, Marcel Maraud Papers, box 5, file 10, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas. Thanks to the Champ d'Asile expert, Dr. Betje B. Klier for excellent editing advice and for steering me to the Maraud Papers.
6. Stanley Faye, Privateers Manuscript, page 188. Faye's handwritten note in the manuscript states that chapter nineteen is fiction.
8. Stanley Faye to J. Frank Dobie, Oct. 30, 1928, Marcel Maraud Papers, box 5, file 8, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.
10. The Historic New Orleans Collection, manuscript 56, New Orleans, La.
11. op. cit. Privateers, p. 185.