PROGRAM ABSTRACTS

Abstracts of General Meeting Programs are usually prepared by the featured speaker and often contain information which may be in conflict with contrasting views or established documentation. The material contained in this section does not, therefore, necessarily reflect the view of The Laffite Society. The Laffite Society does, however, encourage discourse regarding conflicting views.

MONDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 1994

FOURTH GREAT GRAND DAUGHTER OF ARSENE LeBLEU

PATRICIA KEEL

Patricia Bennett Keel recounted the various legends which associated Louisiana pioneer Arsene LeBleu with Jean Laffite.

"Arsene LeBleu was the first white man born in the Calcasieu area. He was among the largest land and slave holders in southwest Louisiana. The old home was a spacious cypress house, covered with plaster, and plastered inside with attractive murals on the smooth walls. Hospitality was the order of the day in those times, supplies and servants were plentiful, and visitors were royally entertained.

Arsene, whom Laffite called 'my captain', always welcomed Laffite and his men into the LeBleu home on English Bayou because Laffite was considered a war hero rather than an outlaw because of his help in defending New Orleans during the Battle of New Orleans. Laffite made his headquarters with LeBleu, spending many delightful days at his home and forming a lasting friendship with the family.

LeBleu built a small log cabin for Jean Laffite where the privateer would often come to rest, feeling safe in his own home with his captains keeping watch nearby. It was rumored that Jean hid some of his gold here.

Part of my merchandise was unloaded at the mouth of the Calcasieu, in the care of Mr. Arsene LeBleu', Laffite wrote. In addition, Arsene LeBleu provided a 'double-pen' log house, a 20 foot by 20 foot structure for storage of Laffite's silks, spices, teas, liquor, jewels, and other contraband. This building stood the wear and tear of many years, but was finally destroyed by the hurricane of August, 1918.

Laffite was at all times generous to a fault to those he loved. Once, in return for a gift of fresh meat and tanned deer hides, Laffite presented Arsene LeBleu with two of his most faithful slaves, Creastauck (a Cuban) and Jean (a gigantic Zulu). These slaves were valued at eighteen hundred dollars each on the market at that time. The descendants of old Creastauck may still be found in the community of Lake Charles today.

Once, when Arsene LeBleu admired a handsome diamond stud Laffite was wearing in his silk shirt, Laffite unscrewed the fabulous gem and tossed it to Lebleu, remarking that he'd better keep it as it was...
much too beautiful for a rough privateer.

Charles Sallier, was a political exile until Laffite brought him to settle in Lake Charles. Sallier was thought to be a minor monarch who’d been exiled from France or a French Province. Jean Laffite helped him to escape and to settle in Louisiana. Sallier was in Opelousas, Louisiana in 1797, and then came westward until he reached the Arsene LeBleu home, east of Lake Charles.

There, Sallier met Arsene LeBleu’s sister, Catherine. Charles Sallier fell in love with the tall, blonde, beautiful Catherine and married her in 1805. He built her a cabin on the southeast shore of the lake, which was then called Charles’ Lake. Later, the little village that sprang up around this lake was called Charlestown, and finally it became Lake Charles. Only two pioneer families, the LeBleus and Salliers were in southwest Calcasieu Parish when Catherine LeBleu and Charles Sallier married.

During the years of 1815 to 1821, when Jean Laffite was headquartered in Galveston, he spent many hours slipping up through the Calcasieu River and Contraband Bayou into Lake Charles. Here he visited his friends, Charles and Catherine Sallier often, docking directly in front of the shell mounds before the house. Their children were loved by Laffite. One day, Jean Laffite told their little girl, Sydalise, ‘See this bag of gold? If you can pick it up, you can have it’. Needless to say, the weight of the bag was too much for the child, but she remembered it and told the tale often to her own grandchildren. Sydalise used to listen from their lakefront home to songs sung by the pirates on their ship. ‘They accompanied themselves on little accordions’, she told her grandchildren, ‘and I got in trouble when I sang the songs and my mother heard the words!’

On one occasion, Laffite told Catherine that she worked too hard and he emphasized his remarks with an oath. She chided him for swearing in her presence and he gallantly replied, ‘Pardon, madame, le Bon Dieu knows I can never atone for so grave an infraction of your hospitality. I can, however, ease my conscience and lighten your burdens’. With these amends he presented her with two fine Negro boys who served her until their respective deaths and whose descendants still live.

Quickly, his men unloaded the treasure off Laffite’s schooner and buried it on shore. Then, they brought their cannons ashore and bombarded their boat until it sank. Hastily, they constructed a fort from a huge shell mound left by Indians.

Either the federal boat could not find Laffite, or the crew was afraid to enter into the lake knowing the smugglers were on shore, but the gunboat was not seen again. After waiting all night and for several more days, with no news of the gunboat, Laffite finally bought another schooner, dug up his treasure and silently slipped back down the river to the Gulf of Mexico.

Circumstances are not clear, but somewhere along the line Charles became jealous of Laffite and accused Catherine of being too friendly with the privateer. One day, shortly after the birth of their sixth child, Charles, raging at Catherine, drew a pistol and shot her. She fell to the floor. Charles assumed she was dead and hastily exited the home.

Continued
He jumped on his horse and raced to the other side of the lake and disappeared. Charles Sallier was never heard from again.

But, Catherine Sallier did not die. She stood up and found the bullet that had hit her hand and then a broach that she was wearing. The broach kept the bullet from penetrating her body and saved her life.

Catherine lived on Shell Beach until she died at the age of 75. She never remarried, and most people believe that she was completely innocent of Charles' accusation.

In early August of 1994, my cousin, Dorothy Barbe, said that she has this amethyst brooch and verified that there are creases where the bullet struck it.

Member Randal Matthews, a third-great grandson of Jane Long, presented the Society with a synopsis of the history of his family. His descendants have lived on the Gulf Coast since the time Jean Laffite occupied Galveston Island.

Much information concerning Jane Long is available from other sources, such as the papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar. In contrast to such known references, Randal provided private anecdotes generally unknown to those outside the family. During Christmas of 1820, while her husband General Long was in Mexico, Jane and her children were starving on barren Bolivar Peninsula. Jane had attempted to catch fish to feed the children, but was unsuccessful. A fishing pole, left stuck in the sand, became exposed as the tide went out. A redfish had taken the bait and was found at the end of the line, providing the family with Christmas dinner.

According to legend, Mrs. Long was among the attendees at perhaps the final dinner given by Laffite prior to his departure from Galveston. Although it is documented that Laffite essentially denied a request from General Long for materials from Campeachy following the disbanding of the commune, it is not generally known that the privateer sent a large quantity of building materials to Jane Long on Bolivar. According to Long family tradition, Laffite sent several of his men to Bolivar to assist in the construction of a house for Jane.

Although not mentioned in references recounting that final dinner, family tradition holds that Jean presented Jane Long with a powder horn as a gift. This horn is now believed to be housed in the Sam Houston Museum in Huntsville.

The above information provided by Randal Matthews was accompanied by a photograph, circa 1900, showing Anne Herbert Long, Jane Long's daughter, and William P. Long, Anne's son. William is great grandfather to Randal Matthews. Randal is also related to Laffite's Lieutenant James Campbell.