Buccaneering on a large scale, as practiced by such renowned freebooters as Hawkins, Morgan, and Lorencillo, had come to an end in the Western Hemisphere before the middle of the eighteenth century, but during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815) and the Wars of Latin American Independence (1811-1825) the maritime commerce of the West Indies was once again harassed by corsairs. This new generation of maritime brigands was predominantly French, Italian and Anglo American in ethnic character, and like their notorious forebears they operated under the pretext of privateering — that is, they were privately owned and armed vessels whose captains carried letters of marque issued by nations at war, and were thus empowered to attack, capture or destroy vessels flying the enemy flag. To escape being branded a pirate under international law a privateer needed to bring his prizes into a port of the nation to which he claimed allegiance and have the seizure formally approved by a court of admiralty. Until they were captured by British forces, the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe were the principal bases for French national privateers; Baltimore and Charleston in the United States, Baracoa in eastern Cuba, and the Haitian ports of Cap Francois (Cap Haitian) and Aux Cayes also traditionally provided safe haven for privateers. After the fall of the island of Guadeloupe to British forces in 1810, many of the French corsairs shifted their operations to the Gulf of Mexico, where they eventually established for themselves a new colony of adventurers, in some ways reminiscent of old Tortuga, in the Baratarian wilderness south of New Orleans.2

As a result, during the second decade of the nineteenth century the Gulf of Mexico fairly swarmed with privateers, many of whom sought to operate within the letter of the law by securing commissions from the various Latin American provinces which had revolted against the Spanish king. For several years, the favorite source of letters of marque was Cartagena de Indias on the Caribbean coast of South America, which declared its independence in 1811 and was thereafter a magnet for all kinds of adventurers. The Mexican Congress got into the act in 1814, followed by the republics of Gran Colombia and the United Provinces of South America (Buenos Aires) in 1816. Within the United States itself there was considerable sympathy for the South American revolutionary movements and no shortage of merchants and public men willing to surreptitiously arm and equip commerce raiders, notwithstanding the various Neutrality Acts enacted by Congress.3 While these “patriot” privateers were supposed to capture and destroy only Spanish-flagged shipping, in practice some corsair captains were not discriminating and preyed upon the shipping of neutral nations when the opportunity presented itself.

Between 1810 and 1820, New Orleans was the principal entrepot where Gulf privateers could safely dispose of their prizes and smuggle their cargoes into the United States without clearing customs. The filibustering impulse was also strongest in Louisiana, where United States citizens and adherents of various Latin American revolutionary movements organized and outfitted ambitious schemes to invade and liberate Texas and other Spanish provinces. A cartel of privateers, contrabandists, and filibusters coalesced around the brothers Pierre and Jean Laffite, who by 1813 had emerged as the titular leaders of the Baratarian underworld. But after the United States army and navy broke up the Barataria Bay rendezvous in September 1814, the privateer captains and their armateurs had to seek out a new base of operations, where a suitable shore establishment could be erected to handle the condemnation of prizes and the disposal of the booty. Such a base needed to be at the same time remote and convenient (that is, an isolated place within easy traveling distance of New Orleans), but it also had to be inaccessible to deep draft vessels as a safety precaution against interference from American and Spanish naval forces.4

While casting about for a new home port for the privateers, the New Orleans cartel and their Baratarian associates
became involved in a complex web of plots aimed at seizing some part of New Spain that could be occupied under the auspices of the Mexican revolutionary government. Plans for sea-borne attacks against Pensacola in West Florida and the Mexican port of Tampico came to naught for lack of naval assets, and after the debacle at Medina River (18 August 1813) there was little real prospect of resurrecting the Republican Army of the North for another land invasion of Texas. Nevertheless, late in 1814 a potentially lucrative traffic in munitions was opened between New Orleans and the Mexican rebel port of Nautla, near Vera Cruz. Shortly after the Battle of New Orleans, Henry Perry, a veteran of the Gutierrez-Magee filibustering expedition of 1812-1813 who had also served with Andrew Jackson's army, organized yet another military expedition against Texas. In September 1815, Colonel Perry's advance party landed on the wind-swept peninsula bordering Galveston Bay, at a point of land he named Bolivar, in honor of the Venezuelan patriot leader.

Opposite Bolivar Point lay Galveston Island (also known as Isle St. Louis and Isla Culebra), a low, sandy barrier island across the mouth of Galveston Bay. The channel between the eastern tip of Galveston Island and Bolivar Point was a little more than three miles wide but had treacherous shoals. Fortunately, there was good ground offshore for brigs and schooners to anchor within a few cable lengths of the beach on the Gulf side of Galveston Island, and inside Galveston Bay the myriad of coastal bayous, lakes, and rivers were easily navigable by pirogue and bateaux. It was here, in the summer of 1816, that the privates of the Gulf set up their new headquarters and developed a smuggling establishment which supplied Louisiana merchants with contraband slaves and other goods at low prices. By the spring of 1817 Galveston had become the nucleus for an international colony of adventurers that grew helter-skelter, as different gangs of freebooters came and left.

The first corsair chieftain to lord over Galveston was Louis-Michel Aury, a mysterious and romantic adventurer who claimed the rank of commodore and exercised control over a motley squadron of brigs and schooners. When he landed on Galveston Island in the fall of 1816, this terror of the Gulf was about 29 years of age and had been a privateersman since 1803. As a young man, he had served briefly in the French navy: some accounts have it that before he deserted the navy he was an ordinary seaman or a sailmaker's mate, while others maintain that he was a midshipman or uncommissioned volunteer who had joined the naval service as an adolescent. All of the available evidence points to his nativity in Paris and to the death of his father when he was very young; that he had a sister named Victoire; that Aury and his sister were raised by their mother in the households of the family Maignet and an uncle named Aury; that young Louis-Michel had some formal education and at least a modicum of naval officer training. Nothing much is known of his career afloat prior to the year 1810, but the activities of the remainder of his life are fairly well documented in official records and in Aury's own writings. In addition to his native French, he appears to have been fluent in English and Spanish and had a knack for self-aggrandizing prose in all three languages. More importantly, he possessed to a remarkable degree the ability to lead criminals and adventure-seekers of both high and low station. He was described by contemporaries as handsome, articulate, proud, and brave; and while his foes characterized him as a pirate and great villain, his compatriots regarded him as a privateer who operated strictly within the law of nations, a gentleman and a staunch patriot.

After an up-and-down career as a corsair operating out of various West Indian islands, including stops in New Orleans, Baltimore, and Charleston, Aury entered the service of the revolutionary council of Cartagena on 9 June 1813. As an officer in Cartagena's privately armed naval force, he rose quickly to the command of a squadron of schooners and may have participated in Chassereux's raid on Portobello on the Isthmus of Panama on 16 January 1814. Judging from his own letters and a memorial of service compiled in 1820, he seems to have generally prospered during his time in South America. The dashing Aury especially made many friends and became a prominent figure among the revolutionary elite. When the royalist army and naval forces under Pablo Morillo laid siege to Cartagena late in July 1815, Aury distinguished himself in several sharp actions, but after a harrowing five-month siege Cartagena's defenses collapsed, and on 5-6 December 1815 Aury's schooners led a flotilla of thirteen vessels carrying refugees and the rebel government in exile through the Spanish blockade to Aux Cayes on the southwest coast of Haiti.
In Aux Cayes, Aury’s dissatisfaction with the revolutionary leadership became acute and he quarreled openly with Simon Bolivar and Luis Brion, who were organizing an expedition to invade Venezuela under the revolutionary banner. Aury was opposed to the leadership of Bolivar, and Brion (who owned most of the ships in Cartagena’s infant navy) refused to volunteer any of his assets unless Bolivar was in overall command. Things turned nasty when Aury demanded payment for services rendered in the defense of Cartagena and refused to turn his schooners over to Brion. His mind was made up when he learned that the Baratarians and their friends from the Mexican revolutionary junta in New Orleans were actively plotting an expedition to seize a Spanish port in the Gulf of Mexico. To Aury, the road to greater fame and prosperity now seemed to lead through the Gulf of Mexico, so he defected before Bolivar’s expeditionary force set sail from Aux Cayes in March 1816 – but not before Haitian president-for-life Alexandre Pétion, a staunch supporter of Bolivar, persuaded him to return the armed brig Constitucion.

Quitting Haiti, Aury took his renegade squadron through the Yucatan Channel into the Gulf of Mexico, where he began making prizes of Spanish shipping. In July he appeared off the mouth of the Mississippi and greatly alarmed the local naval and customs authorities in Louisiana with several brazen violations of the neutrality and revenue laws. During the month of August, he met with the most important leaders of the New Orleans cartel, including Jose Manuel de Herrera, the Mexican Congress’ newly appointed minister plenipotentiary to the United States, who had sailed north from Nautla the previous summer with bundles of blank Mexican letters of marque. He also conferred with the Baratarian boss Pierre Lafitte, who was still recovering from the financial setbacks received at the end of the War of 1812 – but he did not have opportunity to meet with the Baratarian’s younger brother Jean Lafitte, who was then accompanying Major Arsene L. Latour on a clandestine reconnaissance of the Arkansas country (all three had become Spanish secret agents late in 1815 and were actively plotting against the privateers and filibusters). In due course Aury was able to strike a deal with the New Orleans cartel, who enthusiastically supported his leadership of the Galveston project. Sometime between June and August, Aury’s forces had been bolstered by additional ships and a contingent of soldiers, mostly blacks and mulattos recruited in San Domingo and led by Colonel Joseph Savary, a veteran of the Battle of New Orleans. Conspicuous among Aury’s followers were several former soldiers who had served in Napoleon’s armies in Europe.

Once he arrived in Texas, Aury found a chaotic situation on Galveston Island, which had already become the assembly point for criminals and adventurers, including some very hard and desperate characters. Living conditions were primitive both ashore and afloat, and there were perhaps three or four hundred men on the island at that time, as well as an unknown number of women. More to the point, not all of them were disposed to accept Aury’s leadership. A faction within the Santo Domingo contingent appears to have been most dissatisfied and on the night of 7-8 September they staged a mutiny.

Whatever Louis Aury may or may not have been, he was beyond question personally brave and a cool customer under fire. One gang of mutineers stormed Aury’s headquarters and attacked the commodore in his tent, wounding him before they were driven off. In a letter to his sister he wrote: “I received three bullets, one in the right hand which deprives me of the use of the forefinger, one which struck my left breast and passed between flesh and skin, and the other in the left hand.” Though weak from loss of blood, Aury mustered his loyal followers and by dawn was able to regain control over the camp. The mutineers boarded three small schooners and were allowed to sail away to New Orleans, taking with them much of the accumulated booty.

Four days later, on 12 September, a brief ceremony was held on the eastern end of Galveston Island, where Minister Herrera officially bestowed upon Commodore Aury the title of military and civil governor of that place, which was designated a Puerto Habilitado of the Mexican republic. A salute was fired and the flag of independent Mexico was raised. In short order a local government was organized, with a customhouse (managed by Aury’s associate Pierre Rousselin) and an admiralty court (headed up by Messrs. Ducoin and Espagnol) authorized to condemn lawful prizes. By then several of Aury’s vessels, their captains equipped with both Cartagena and Mexican commissions, had fanned out across the Gulf in search of prizes. While we do not know the actual
composition of Aury's Texas squadron, contemporary sources indicate fourteen or sixteen vessels, including prizes and auxiliaries. The most noteworthy of these were the brigs Mexican Congress, of 14 or 16 guns, which later served as Aury's flagship, and Mars, also of 14 guns; and the schooners Jupiter, Gran Sultan, Bellona, La Guerriere, and America Libre, which carried between six and eight guns apiece.20

Over the next three months, Aury worked tirelessly to unite the various factions within the colony of adventurers and to put his own privateering enterprise upon a sound business footing. Unlike the Laffite brothers and the other Baratarian corsairs, who operated more or less independently, Aury was the de facto leader of a flotilla of privateers whose captains cruised when and where the commodore directed. The details are lacking in the archival record, but the prize money was probably distributed in the normal manner, with a substantial part of the loot deposited with the Bank of Louisiana in New Orleans.21 Aury enlarged his fortified camp on the eastern end of the island, where a rude village of thatched huts and tents clustered along the low, sandy ridge, roughly where the University of Texas Medical Branch now stands. Aury himself appears to have eschewed any kind of commandant's house: visitors to Galveston found him set up in an old hulk, which would have been the familiar naval expedition. Throughout the latter part of 1816 and early 1817, more and more privateers resorted to Galveston to dispose of their prizes or to escape from pursuing men-o'-war. Within a year after escaping from Cartagena, Aury had a practical monopoly of privateering in the Gulf of Mexico.22

Unheralded, but accompanied by rumors that he intended to lead a two- to four-thousand man army in an assault on Tampico or Pensacola, General Francisco Xavier Mina arrived at Galveston Island on 24 November 1816, after a horrific, fever-wrought 30-day voyage from Port-au-Prince. The dashing 27-year-old native of Navarre had gained notoriety as a guerillero fighting against the French in Spain and in 1815 he had gone to the United States to organize the liberation of Mexico. Encouraged by liberals and speculators, Mina assembled a small cadre of professionally-trained soldiers and hired vessels to transport them to Haiti, thence to Galveston. After some bickering, Aury agreed to become Mina's partner.23

Although Aury's Galveston enterprise was now at its zenith, the success of the Texas project had already begun to wane shortly after Mina appeared on the scene. In its natural condition, Galveston Island was an inhospitable sand bar, subject to overflows caused by Gulf storms, nearly treeless, and without much fresh water. The colony had to be provisioned almost entirely by sea, and while smuggling slaves and other merchandise into Louisiana was immensely profitable, the nearest market was New Orleans, a six-day journey by schooner and barge, two weeks by skiff or pirogue, a month overland along the ancient pathway across the coastal plain. The United States had also stepped up its efforts to interdict smugglers, harry filibusters, and suppress piracy - the rise in maritime brigandage was becoming a serious threat to legitimate commerce and American mercantile interests were calling for more warships and revenue cutters to be sent to the Gulf station. Finally, as an irregular naval base, Galveston had serious drawbacks. Even with fair weather and a skilled pilot, navigating the waters of the Bolivar Roads and Galveston Bay was not for the faint of heart. In dirty weather, Galveston became a graveyard for vessels large and small, and Aury saw several of his valuable assets sunk or grounded.24

After a final conference with his American backers in February or March, General Mina became convinced that the schemes of the New Orleans cartel were motivated more by commerce than liberal ideology. He then resolved to begin the liberation of Mexico with an amphibious landing on the Gulf Coast at Soto la Marina, in the province of Nuevo Santander (modern-day Tamaulipas). Returning to Galveston in mid-March, Mina had a long conversation with Commodore Aury, who obviously did not share the general's enthusiasm for the invasion plan but nevertheless agreed to convoy Mina's expeditionary force to Soto la Marina. Aury probably viewed the expedition as a quick and painless way to rid himself of the troublesome revolutionary and his Anglo American allies - he may have also seen it as a way to eliminate a competitor, and thereby wrangle additional resources from the New Orleans cartel for his own purposes. In due course, Mina, his American honor guard, and about three hundred soldiers (including Colonel Perry's semi-independent contingent) were embarked on eight privately hired transports, which set off from Galveston in
early April, escorted by several of Aury’s cruisers. Mina and his little army landed at Soto la Marina on 15 April and were scarcely ashore before Aury’s privateers set sail and started to beat back up the coast to Galveston, pausing en route to inspect the anchorage in Matagorda Bay. Left to his own devices, Mina met with some early success but his expedition ended in complete disaster. Cut off from reinforcements, he was defeated and captured at Venadito on 27 October and was executed by firing squad on 11 November.

Unfortunately for Commodore Aury, fate chose this moment in history to play an ironic trick. A few days before Mina’s expedition departed for Soto la Marina, a vessel from New Orleans had appeared off Galveston bearing none other than Jean Lafitte, who had been dispatched by the captain-general of Cuba to spy on the Galveston colony under cover of a commercial visit. As he recorded in his diary, Lafitte had interviews with both Aury and Mina, whence he learned some of the details of their impending expedition against Soto la Marina. Hurrying back to New Orleans, Lafitte met with his brother and other confidential advisors, who then proposed to the Spanish consul that the Baratarians take control of Galveston during Aury and Mina’s absence, install a new regime to operate the place as a rendezvous for privateers (controlled by the brothers Lafitte, of course), and use it as a front for their clandestine efforts to confuse His Catholic Majesty’s enemies. The Spanish vice-consul in New Orleans urged acceptance of the Lafitte plan and the Baratarians rushed to organize an expedition for the relief of Galveston. Acting as front-man for his brother, Jean Lafitte quickly effected a bloodless coup d’état at Galveston, which was practically deserted when poor minister Herrera swore in the new government on board Bathelomy Lafon’s schooner Carmelita on 15 April. When Aury returned from Soto la Marina in early May, he found the Baratarians firmly entrenched on Galveston.

Seeing the writing on the wall, Aury had already attempted to establish a new base of operations at Matagorda Bay (Herrera had specifically given him discretionary power to move the seat of government from Galveston). However, deficiencies in the harbor, the loss of several of his ships in a tropical storm, and Indian troubles (the Karankawa massacred his shipwrecked crews) compelled him to quit the Texas coast. He announced his decision to leave the Gulf in a letter to Minister Herrera, in which he disavowed any connection with the goings-on at Galveston after 31 July 1817. He also duly informed the Collector of the Port of New Orleans of his intentions.

Aury had decided to go to Amelia Island, at the mouth of the St. Mary’s River on the Atlantic Coast of Florida, to hook up with the swashbuckling General Gregor MacGregor, who had launched an invasion of Spanish East Florida through the border outpost at Fernandina at the end of June. MacGregor was a Scots soldier-of-fortune who had fought alongside Bolivar in Venezuela and was personally known to Aury, who also liked to portray himself as a Latin American patriot by adoption. However, when Aury arrived off Amelia Island on 17 September, he was disappointed to learn that General MacGregor had abandoned the venture a few days earlier, having exhausted his funding and the patience of his rag-tag army. Without missing a beat, Aury hoisted the colors of the Mexican Congress and proclaimed himself to be the commander-in-chief of the forces on Amelia Island, a dependency of the Mexican republic. (He seems to have conveniently forgotten having formally tendered his resignation from the Mexican service two months earlier.) With the assistance of the propagandist Vicente Pazos Silva, a former newspaper editor from Buenos Aires, and Dr. Pedro Gaul, Venezuela’s revolutionary agent in the United States, he formed a new council of government which immediately elected him supreme military and civil commander. “We have come here to plant the tree of liberty,” he announced in one of his proclamations, and then declared martial law. It is not clear how Aury expected to persist with a privateer base so close to American territory, though he may have reckoned on eventually becoming a stakeholder in a scheme to annex East Florida to the United States. It is doubtful, however, that he ever intended to use Amelia Island as anything more than a temporary base and as window dressing to deflect charges of piracy.

The beginning of the end of Aury’s Amelia Island adventure came in November 1817, when the Monroe Administration decided to evict the Florida revolutionaries, whose presence threatened to disrupt diplomacy that would eventually result in the Adams-Onis Treaty. On 22 December a United States warship carrying a contingent of soldiers from the Charleston garrison
dropped anchor off Aury's headquarters and demanded the surrender of the place. Aury made an equivocal reply, indicating that he was the legitimate head of the new revolutionary government that had wrested Florida from Spain; he was, however, willing to negotiate a mutually beneficial settlement, then step aside and allow the United States to occupy Fernandina. The Americans replied with an ultimatum: haul down the Mexican flag, embark all foreign soldiers, and sail away forthwith - or, suffer the consequences. Realizing that his position was untenable, Aury threw dignity to the winds and complied, handing over the fort to representatives of the United States Navy and Army on 23 December. Most of Aury's forces departed from Amelia Island during the next few weeks, with Aury himself lingering about until the end of January 1818.38

After leaving Florida, Aury touched briefly at Charleston, South Carolina, once a favorite haunt of French privateers and a place where he was a familiar figure. Too familiar, as it turned out. On 16 March, he was arrested on the basis of a complaint filed by the Spanish consul there, representing the owners of a Spanish merchant vessel seized by Aury in May 1814 - one of the shipowners had recognized Aury walking down the street in Charleston. When called to appear in federal district court, Aury's attorney pleaded that his client was a foreign national and that the alleged crime had occurred outside the jurisdiction of the United States. On 18 March Judge William Drayton dismissed Hernandez vs. Aury and the commodore hastened back to sea, never to set foot again in the United States.39

Searching for a suitable location on which to build a permanent establishment outside the reach of any of the major powers, Aury headed back to the Caribbean, armed with a fresh privateer's commission from the American agent of the Provincias Federales de Buenos Aires y Chili.35 On 4 July 1818 he easily captured Isla de Providencia y Santa Catalina, part of an archipelago of raised coral and limestone islands approximately 385 miles northeast of Cartagena and 110 miles off the Central American mainland. Here he founded a new international colony of adventure under the flags of Mexico, Venezuela, New Granada, and Buenos Aires. Taking over the settlement of Isabella, Aury reconstructed the old fort and attracted to his banner several hundred more of the sort of men he had commanded at Galveston and Amelia Island.36 There he prospered for the next year or so, all the while intriguing with the representatives of various South American revolutionary movements in a desperate effort to obtain the support and protection he needed to continue his operations. He also joined forces once again with his old friend General MacGregor, who had returned to the Caribbean to launch another series of disastrous forays against the Spanish Main.37

Aury enjoyed somewhat better luck than his old comrade in arms. On 13 May 1819 he appeared off the coast of Guatemala, dispatched an assault force up the Rio Dulce, and captured the Castillo de San Felipe on Lake Izabal. Cruising off Central America, Aury's privateers also made several valuable prizes, worth $700,000 according to one newspaper report.38 After coping with a hurricane, famine, and an outbreak of fever on Old Providence, during April-May 1821 he attacked the fortified towns of Trujillo and the Castillo de San Fernando at Omoa in the Gulf of Honduras, but was driven off by the defenders.39 The raids against the Spanish Main and occasional seizures of Spanish merchant ships netted him handsome profits, but Aury's more ambitious projects to liberate Central America failed to produce measurable results and his grandiose privateering schemes began gradually to degenerate into piracy. By 1821 the romantic figure who had once been a terror to the Spaniards was in reality little more than a petty buccaneer, the self-proclaimed liberator of an obscure island off the Mosquito Coast, and a minor actor in what one newspaper called "the fag-end of what was recently called privateering."

The last straw came on 18 January 1821, when he was summarily dismissed from the service of the republic of Gran Colombia by order of his old nemesis, Simon Bolivar, now firmly established as El Libertador. Aury received no response from Jose de San Martin to his proposal to liberate Panama and several of the new republics disavowed privateering altogether. Deeply embittered, he retired to his home on Old Providence, where he composed a lengthy petition to the congress in Bogota, detailing the many injustices done to him by Brion and others.41 There, on 30 August 1821, he died from injuries received in a fall from horseback. He was thirty-three years old.42 After Aury's death, his loyal lieutenant, Jean Baptiste Faquere, remained in command of the privateer remnants at Old Providence and was installed as governor of that place when the archipelago was formally
attached to the republic of Gran Colombia in 1822. By that time most of the privateersmen had drifted away, but a rather surprising number of Aury’s associates and followers later found their way into the history books.

In 1820 the King of the Mosquitos awarded Gregor MacGregor (who never stopped meditating on grand schemes) a 7,000-square mile land grant along the Rio Tinto, in present-day Olancho department, Honduras. Here the general (now cacique, self-styled as the “prince of Poyais”) attempted to plant an English-speaking agricultural colony. Subsequently imprisoned in both France and England for fraud, MacGregor and the lovely Donna Josepha returned to Venezuela penniless in 1839 to be pensioned by a grateful Colombian government. Louis Peru de Lacroix, Aury’s principal military commander and formerly an officer in the French army, went on to distinguish himself as a general in the Colombian army under Bolivar and penned a famous diary of his experiences as a member of El Libertador’s inner circle at Bucaramanga.

Sebastian Boquier, an Italian adventurer who had joined Aury in 1815 as the captain of the schooner Gran Sultan, in 1820 took a commission in the Venezuelan navy and won honors for his service at the Battle of Lake Maracaibo (24 July 1825).

The Italian soldiers of fortune Constante Ferrari and Agustín Codazzi, who had fought in Napoleon’s Grande Armée at Waterloo and freelanced for the Sultan in Constantinople before following Aury to Galveston, Amelia Island, and Old Providence, both retired briefly to Europe in the early 1820’s, then returned to Latin America. Codazzi earned distinction in Colombia and Venezuela as a geographer and cartographer, and authored an important memoir of his career as a privateersman that was published in 1970.

Ferrari continued to find employment as a soldier of fortune in both South America and Europe, befriended Lord Byron in Greece, and also wrote a memoir that was not published until long after his death.

An otherwise obscure Aury follower, one George Donald Schumph, an Anglo Canadian adventurer who had been at both Galveston and Old Providence, earned a footnote in the history of the brothers Laffite. After Aury’s death, Schumph drifted to Belize and eventually found his way to the northern coast of the Yucatan peninsula, where at the end of October 1821 he and the old Baratarian corsair Pierre Laffite were caught in the middle of a shoot-out between local militiamen and a gang of Italian pirates. Both Schumph and Laffite were taken into custody by the Spanish commander, but Laffite was mortally wounded in the gunfight and was buried in the campo santo of the Church of Santa Clara de Dzidzantun. Schumph was escorted to Merida (accompanied part of the way by Laffite’s Anglo-French companion, Lucy Allen), where he was interrogated briefly by the authorities, and then vanished into the fog of history.

Although in his own day Aury’s name was a household word because of his quasi-piratical activities, his Texas adventures are recalled in popular histories written for North Americans chiefly as a prelude to Jean Laffite’s occupation of Galveston Island, while his Amelia Island enterprise customarily receives scant attention in all but the most specialized of histories. Most scholarly works in English treat him as an independent freebooter who flashed across the horizon of notoriety, then vanished into obscurity. Among Latin American historians his activities are somewhat better known, or at least better appreciated, and he is the subject of an excellent book-length biography published in 1976 by the Argentine diplomat and scholar Carlos A. Ferro.

References

1. This essay is a slightly expanded version of a paper, “The Adventures of Louis Aury on the Texas Coast, 1816-1817,” read at a symposium on the Corsarios and Maury D. Baker, Jr., “The United States and the Disruption of the Spanish


3. For background on the Latin American wars of independence, see Charles Carroll Griffin, The United States and the Disruption of the Spanish
Robert C. Vogel, "Jean Lafitte, the Baratarians and the Historical Geography of Piracy in the Gulf of Mexico," Gulf Coast Historical Review 5 (1950):62-77; present an overview of the Lafitte brothers' activities in Louisiana and Texas.


8 The biographical information on Aury presented in this essay is based to a large extent upon two well-known secondary sources: Stanley Faye, "Commodore Aury," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 24 (1941):612-697; and Carlos A. Ferro, Vida de Luis Aury, Corsario de Buenos Aires en las luchas por la Independencia de Venezuela, Colombia y Centroamerica (Buenos Aires, 1976). The latter is by far the most comprehensive treatment, based on exacting research in Latin American archival sources, but devotes a disappointingly short chapter to Aury's adventures in Texas. A collection of Aury's personal papers is preserved in the Aury Papers at the Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin. A collection of twenty-three items dating from 1808-1821 that includes an undated (and unauthentic) pencil sketch purported to be of Aury himself. Excerpts from several of the Aury letters were published in English translation by Lancaster E. Dabney is his article, "Luis Aury: The First Governor of Texas Under the Mexican Republic," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 41 (1938):108-116. Court documents and notarial records provide fleeting glimpses into Aury's activities in the United States prior to 1815. See, e.g., U.S. District Court cases 374, 376, 377 relating to Aury and the his problems in New Orleans in 1810 as captain of the French national privateer Guillaume; Records of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana, Record Group 21, National Archives and Records Center-Southwest Region, Fort Worth, Tex. None of Aury's biographers have made much use of these kinds of archival materials, the careful study of which might shed important new light on aspects of Aury's career.

9 What appears to be a rough draft of this remarkable document, which has never been published in English, is in the Aury Papers at the Center for American History.


12 The backdrop for this episode is the so-called Assembly of Aux Cayes. General Simon Bolivar (1783-1830) resigned command of the rebel armies on 8 May 1815 and went into exile on the island of Jamaica. Upon hearing of the fall of Cartagena, he went to Aux Cayes (auxiliary camp) on 21 June 1815 at the end of December 1815 and participated in a conference that lasted until early March 1816, when he was proclaimed supreme political and military commander. On 31 March, Bolivar sailed from Aux Cayes bound for Margarita Island with 340 soldiers, escorted by a squadron of Brion's privateers (including Killiano Beluche in his schooner La Popa), but the Aux Cayes expedition was a failure and he returned to Aux Cayes in July. Bolivar successfully re-invaded Venezuela at the end of 1816 and captured the town of Angostura (now Ciudad Bolivar), where he was proclaimed dictator. Subsequently, in 1819 he marched into New Granada (Colombia), defeated the Spanish armies there, and in turn crushed the royalist army in Venezuela by June 1821. We know that Aury was in Port-au-Prince in March 1816: preserved in the Aury Papers is a letter from him to his sister Victoire dated there on the fifteenth of the month.

13 Niles' Weekly Register (Baltimore), 31 August 1816; L'Ami des Lois (New Orleans), 30 July and 5 August 1816.

14 Harris Gaylord Warren, ed., "Documents Relating to the Establishment of Privateers at Galveston, 1816-1817," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 21 (1938):1056-1109; see also Alaman, Historia de Mexico, 4:225, 459-460; and Grffen, The United States and the Disruption of the Spanish Empire, pp. 155-156. Many documents relating to Herrera's dealings with the New Orleans cartel have been collected in Mexico City in the Archivo General de la Nacion, Operaciones de Guerra (vol. 1), along with the correspondence of the viceroy and others with authorities in Cuba and Texas concerning Aury.

Review of "The Expedition of General Mina to Mexico, 1817," in op. cit.

In her letter to Sir James Tyrwhitt, 25 October 1817, Consuelo de la Bahia de Galvestown, described Galveston as "a small island, or rather a small sand-bar" with "no buildings, except a few huts or cabins, probably three or four, made of boards and sail of vessels." According to Robinson, who was an eye-witness, Aury built a "mud fort" to the west of Mina's encampment; Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution, p. 105.


Robinson, Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution, p. 104; cf. David G. McComb, Galveston: A History (Austin, 1986), p. 8. A contemporary map, titled Bahia de Galvez-town, appears as plate 34 in the Direccion Hidrografica atlas, Portulano de la America Setentrional (Madrid, 1818). Better known are the Plano de la Bahia y Puerto de Galveston en el Departamento de Texas, drawn by Alexander Thompson for the Mexican Navy in 1828, and the Entrada de la Bahia de Galveston, which the present writer has seen only in the form of a photostat at the Rosenberg Library, Galveston, which is said to have been obtained from an original archived in Bogota, Colombia.


Alaman, Historia de Mejico, 4:518-524. All of Mina's vessels, except the Ellen Tucker, were captured off Soto la Marina by Spanish naval vessels dispatched from Vera Cruz; Robinson, Memoirs of the Mexican Revolution, pp. 153-155.

Jean Lafitte's diary is enclosure number one in Fatio to Cienfuegos, 24 May 1817, legajo 1900, Papeles de Cuba, Archivo General de la Nacion in Mexico City, where they can be found in the Historia series (vols. 96 and 152). Particularly detailed information about Aury's operations at Galveston was obtained by Beverly Chew, Collector of the Port of New Orleans, which were transmitted to the Secretary of the Treasury; of special interest are his letters dated 1 August 1817, 30 August 1817, 17 October 1817; see Correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury with Collectors of Customs 1789-1838 From Record Group 56, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, National Archives Microcopy M176, roll 16; excerpts from these materials were printed in the American State Papers, Class I, Foreign Relations, 6 vols. (Washington, 1834), 4:134-138, 143-144. See also Warren, The Sword Was Their Passport, pp. 143-144, and Bancroft, Works, Volume XV: History of the North Mexican States and Texas, pp. 34-56.

No table of organization of the Gulf corsairs exists, of course, but some idea of the composition of Aury's squadron can be ascertained from reports printed in contemporary newspapers (e.g. Niles' Weekly Register, 31 August 1816, 21 September 1816, and 2 August 1817) and from New Orleans customhouse and federal court records. For general information about Aury's captains, references to their various vessels, see Ferro, Vida de Luis Aury, pp. 171-177.
Aury’s Invasion de MacGregor managed to capture the ancient Nacion! Bogota; see the online 51-56.

To place Quarterly Hobart Huson, includes the text of this document, which is James J. Parsons) background pr. 33-56, to and Related editor Mejico, 22, 26-33. Manifest and Spanish Empire 26 September l 1800-1821 ISlands in the Western from the to and his subordinates carefully TexBS.z..p. Times the 36-37. Message Archives, Center for American History((Lexington, 1992), pp. 4:639-640’ Bancroft}, 1817-1822 (Austin, The text of Aury’s to Amelia Island oomposed letter Refugio: 4:149; see also Davis, to the Secretary of State, New York 1 l 1818; in Miscellaneous Letters of Florida, from the commandant of Puerto Rico, of Dutch occupation of Amelia Island appeared in the Daily National Intelligencer (Washington) in the form of a letter to the editor that was printed on 26 February 1818.

The story of Aury’s run-in with the American criminal justice system in Charleston was reported in Niles’ Weekly Register, 4 April 1818. At that time, there was a rumor of Aury and information Hercifore Communicated, Relating to the Occupation of Amelia Island, 15th Cong. 1st sess., House Doc. 175 (Washington, 1817), pp. 36-37. Aury addressed his letter to Herrera in New Orleans from Galveston, but his note to Chew, dated 28 July, with a duplicate dated 31 July, was composed at sea. In his letter to the Secretary of the Treasury of 7 October 1817, Chew reported that Aury was heading for Amelia Island after having smuggled a last cargo of 300 slaves into Louisiana; in the same communication he also noted receipt of Aury’s letter of 31 July 1817. According to Bancroft, Aury learned of MacGregor’s expedition before he returned to Galveston about the middle of July; History of the North Mexican States and Texas, pp. 38-39.

The standard sources for MacGregor’s invasion of Florida are T. Frederick Davis, MacGregor’s Invasion of Florida, 1817: Together with an Account of His Successors, Irwin, Hubbard, and Aury on Amelia Island, East Florida (Jacksonville, 1926), pp. 5-52; and John Skinner, “Letters Relating to MacGregor’s Attempted Conquest of East Florida, 1817,” in Florida Historical Quarterly 5 (1926):54-57; see also Ferro, Vida de Luis Aury, pp. 45-57. Sir Gregor MacGregor (1786-1845) had been a captain in the British army before enlisting in the service of the Venezuelan revolutionary Francisco Miranda, and joined Bolivar, with whom he seems to have had a falling out; see “Sir Gregor Macgregor,” in Dictionary of National Biography, ed. Leslie Stephen, 66 vols. (London, 1885-1901), 12:539. Mac Gregor’s wife, the beautiful Dona Josepha, was Bolivar’s niece.

Aury’s activities at Amelia Island are chronicled in Davis, MacGregor’s Invasion of Florida, pp. 53-56, and were widely reported in the American press; see, e.g., National Intelligencer (Washington) 11 October 1817, 18 October 1817, 3 January 1818, 10 January 1818, 10 February 1818, and 11 April 1818; New York Spectator (New York City) 19 December 1817. Aury’s principal collaborator was Pedro Gaul, New Granada’s agent in the United States; for background on Gaul’s remarkable career, see Harold A. Bierck, Jr., Vida Publica de Don Pedro Gaul (Caracas, 1944). To place the Amelia Island affair in its broad diplomatic and political context, see Frank Lawrence Owsey, Jr., and Gene A. Smith, Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821 (Tuscaloosa, 1997), pp. 118-140, and William Earl Weeks, John Quincy Adams and America’s Global Empire (Lexington, 1992), pp. 63-64. Many important documents related to MacGregor and Aury’s activities at Amelia Island were printed in American State Papers Foreign Relations, 4:139-144, 183-202.

Aury to J. D. Henley and James Bankhead, Headquarters, 22 December 1817, in American State Papers Foreign Relations, 4:149; see also Davis, MacGregor’s Invasion of Florida, pp. 51-56. An unsigned history of MacGregor and Aury’s occupation of Amelia Island appeared in the Daily National Intelligencer (Washington) in the form of a letter to the editor that was printed on 26 February 1818.

Ferro includes the text of this document, which is dated 3 June 1818, in an appendix to his Vida de Luis Aury, pp. 189-190.

James J. Parsons, San Andres and Providencia: English-Speaking Islands in the Western Caribbean, University of California Publications in Geography Volume 12, No. 1 (Berkeley, 1956), is the best source of background information about Old Providence, but devotes only two pages to Aury’s occupation. A reproduction of a contemporary drawing of the fort occupied by Aury is in the Archivo General de la Nacion, Bogota; see the online history of San Andres y Providencia by Juan Carlos Eastman Arango (originally published in 1992) posted on the World Wide Web (http://www.banrep.gov.co/blaservirtual/credencial/hsanayp.htm). News of Aury’s capture of Old Providence appeared in Niles’ Weekly Register, 26 September 1818, in Miscellaneous Letters and Related Materials, 1789-1861, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 55, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

MacGregor managed to capture the ancient town of Portobello (in present-day Panama) on 8 April and occupied the place until 30 April 1819, when he was driven off by a Spanish force led by the governor of Panama; Davis, MacGregor’s Invasion of Florida, p. 69; Bancroft, Works, Volume VII, History of Central America, pp. 498-501; see also the Charleston Courier, 24 April 1819, 29 May 1819, 10 June 1819, 12 June 1819, 21 June 1819; Niles’ Weekly Register, 5 June 1819 and 5 July
1819. MacGregor's disastrous attack on Rio de la Hache in September 1819 was reported in the Charleston Courier, 18 November 1819. There were only 27 survivors, including the general, out of an assault force of about 250.

36 *Niles' Weekly Register*, 31 July 1819.


40 *Niles' Weekly Register*, 22 September 1821. An editorial in the Charleston Courier, 20 October 1819, declared: "Pirates on the ocean have become so frequent that they are matters of every-day occurrence, and are passed over with the same complacency as those minor acts of venality which too often escape punishment from their insignificance."

41 Simon Bolivar to Captain Luis Aury, Bogota, 18 January 1821; in *Cartas del Libertador: Corregidas Conforme a los Originales*, ed. Vicente Lecuna, 4 vols. (Caracas, 1929), 2:500. At the time, Bolivar was president of the republic of Colombia, which comprised the modern states of Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Aury suggested a project to liberate Panama in a letter to San Martin dated 7 February 1821; see Julio César González, "Una Invitacion a San Martin para Independizar a Panama," *Revista del Museo de la Casa de Gobierno* (1956) 1:27-37.

42 Aury's death on Old Providence was reported in the *National Intelligencer*, 8 December 1821. The circumstances surrounding his demise are described in Ferro, *Vida de Luis Aury*, pp. 159-164. An inventory of his estate, duly attested by his closest followers, is preserved in the Aury Papers. On behalf of the late commodore's estate, these same executors also formulated a bill for services rendered to the government of New Granada, seeking $49,452.20 as reimbursement for personal funds advanced to the revolutionary cause by Aury since 1814. The bill was never paid, and indeed may never have been presented. Not surprisingly, later writers offered alternative endings to the life of Aury. Henderson Yoakum was of the opinion that Aury returned to Cuba after the end of his Old Providence adventure; *History of Texas*, 1:194. This is apparently the source used by Hubert Howe Bancroft, who reported in his *History of the North Mexican States and Mexico*: "After serving the cause of the patriots for some years, Aury returned to New Orleans, and being a man of fine appearance, married a rich widow, from whom, however, he was separated some time afterward. As late as 1845 he was residing at Habana" (p. 39, footnote 15); cf. Appleton's *Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, ed. James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, 6 vols. (New York, 1887-89), 1:119.

43 Parsons, *San Andres and Providencia*, p. 21. *Niles' Weekly Register*, 13 July 1822, reported that nine vessels remained there from Aury's squadron when Old Providence was annexed to Gran Colombia.


46 Ferro, *Vida de Luis Aury*, pp. 173-174. There is no serviceable biography of Agustin Codazzi (1793-1859) in English; however, the Biblioteca Virtual of the Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango, Bogota, offers an online article by Beatriz Gerulewicz (Caracas, 1970), but the present writer has no knowledge of the existence of an English edition.


49 See the article on Aury in the Handbook of Texas Online (http://www/tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/viewAA/1au4.html).