SUMMARIES OF MINUTES
OF
LAFFITE SOCIETY MEETINGS

July, 2001 through December, 2001

Dorothy McD. Karilanovic

July 10, 2001
Minutes of the June meeting, recorded by Press Director Dave Roberts in the absence of Dorothy Karilanovic, Secretary, who was out of town, were approved as read by the Secretary.

Treasurer, Jerry Eubank, reported a balance in the Laffite Society account on this date of $3,382.79.

President Jeff Modzelewski read to members the Laffite Society Secretary’s March 29 English translation of a report on an analysis of the handwriting in the controversial document, The Journal of Jean Laffite: the Privateer-Patriot’s Own Story, prepared by French Laffite Society member Patrick Lafitte. Mr. Lafitte’s report was intended for a seminar held at The University of Texas in Austin, TX on March 9, 2001, entitled The French in Texas sponsored by the departments of Italian and French at the university. Due to time limits, and as no English translation was available at that time, the paper was not presented at the seminar. Following the reading, members discussed various conclusions observed in the report questioning the authenticity of the handwriting in The Journal.

Referring to Privateers of the Gulf, from a copy of a type-written manuscript written in 1928 by Stanley Faye, recently published by editor Don C. Marler of Dogwood Press, Dr. Reginald Wilson discussed quoted material from a letter written to Texas history writer J. Frank Dobie January 16, 1929 by Faye, who had lived and been educated in France. Paraphrasing from Faye’s text, Dr. Wilson stated that, assuming that the Laffites were from Bordeaux or Bayonne, in the Languedoc region of southwestern France, it does not necessarily follow that they spoke French. In the 19th century and for generations the Gascuono dialect had been spoken fluently “by certainly half the people, preferred to French by the working people . . . in some places used to the exclusion of French.” Further, three dialects or separate languages, including Gascuono, which sounds like Spanish, were spoken in the Languedoc region, any one or all three of which, or a mixture, may have been spoken by the Laffites, thus possibly explaining why most of the French language used in The Journal of Jean Laffite: the Privateer-Patriot’s Own Story, alleged to have been written by Jean Laffite, was not that of a well-educated speaker of French.

In his recent analysis of the handwriting in the controversial Journal, French researcher Patrick Lafitte has called attention to the omission from John A. Laffite’s 1958 publication of this document of a sentence that mentions the city of Trujillo in Santo Domingo (cf. p. 193 of the original French text). Since the name “Port-au-Prince” was not changed to “Trujillo” until the years 1936 to 1961, the author of The Journal, which was allegedly written from 1845-1850, could only have known this if he had written it in 1936 or after.

Discussion followed on whether or not other sites names “Trujillo” existed in Santo Domingo in the 1800s to which the author of The Journal might have alluded.

President Jeff Modzelewski read to members from three letters written to Dr. Reginald Wilson from Laffite author/researcher Robert C. Vogel, referring to newspaper accounts of the purported death of Jean Laffite during a skirmish with a British warship. Quoting Vogel’s reference, “the ‘famous Laffite’ was reported among the gang of pirates attacked by USS Alligator off Sugar Key, Cuba, in May, 1822 - he escaped, according to the officer in charge.”

In another instance, Robert Vogel quoted, “British naval records clearly stated
The meeting arranges Member that James De La Porta, which had continued Laffite's Society Chronicles, a newsletter on Jean Laffite, requested to present a dish. The FL, Laffite's death a bio-sketch. Concerning slavery in future generations that Jean Laffite confirmed.

August 14, 2001

Minutes of the July 10th meeting were approved as read to members by the Secretary.

Treasurer, Jerry Eubank, reported a balance in the Society's account this date of $3,551.97.

Copies of The Laffite Society Chronicles, Vol. VII, No. 2, October, 2001, were given out to members present.

President Jeff Modzelewski called attention to a book chapter on Jean Laffite, some theories of his origin and fate, recently completed and submitted by ex-officio President of The Laffite Society R. Dale Olson. The chapter will be included in a publication compiling historical research by contributors to a seminar entitled The French in Texas, held in March of this year and sponsored by the French and Italian departments at The University of Texas in Austin, TX.

Secretary Dorothy Karilanovic reported she had arranged for Professor Alex Pratt of College of the Mainland in Texas City, TX to speak to The Laffite Society on Tuesday, November 13, 2001, on the subject of slavery in Texas and in Galveston. At Professor Pratt's request, the Secretary will prepare and send a letter to him confirming the date and time, etc.

After a short discussion and review of Laffite Society funds available, members decided that funding of individual research investigation would not be feasible at this time due to the expense required. The committee formed to consider the proposal of Editor-of-Publications Don Marler is therefore dissolved.

Laffite Society Historian and Advisory Board Member Jean L. Epperson read to members her new article in the latest issue of The Laffite Society Chronicles, "The Final Years of Jean Laffite," intended for the purpose of inspiring responses pro and con from readers on the theories presented. The article included a summary of theories and historical newspaper accounts of the reported death of Jean Laffite, leading Ms. Epperson to a logical conclusion that Laffite died "in the early months of 1823, probably in a sea battle with an, as yet, unknown adversary."

Other historical newspaper accounts possibly confirming Laffite's death at this time are being investigated by Laffite Society member, Gary Fretz of Fort Lauderdale, FL, and will be reported in due course.

Advisory Board member Dr. Reginald Wilson continued his discussion briefly on the Spanish practice of mining and transporting great quantities of silver from South America which had continued over several centuries. Dr. Wilson referred members to an article in a recent issue of National Geographic Magazine on pirates and privateers and the practice of transporting silver into Havana, Cuba, in the 15th and 16th centuries.

September 11, 2001

Meeting this date was canceled because of the terroristic attacks in New York City, Pennsylvania, and in Washington, D.C.

October 9, 2001

President Jeff Modzelewski called for volunteers to provide refreshments for the November 13 meeting on "Slavery in Texas," at which extra attendance is anticipated. Don Peak and Stephen Broadstone offered to contribute and other members were invited to bring a dish.

President stated he would telephone Professor Alex Pratt, speaker for the November 13 date, to reconfirm date and to request a bio-sketch.

Minutes of the August 14 meeting were approved as read to members by the Secretary. Due to cancellation of the September 11 meeting, the date of the terroristic attacks in New York City, Pennsylvania, and in Washington, D.C., no Minutes were available for that month.

Treasurer, Jerry Eubank, submitted her report showing a balance as of October 9, '01 of $3,067.83.

The President read to members a letter written in English from French Laffite Society member Patrick Laffite, offering his condolences to his Laffitian friends following the disastrous September 11 attacks on our nation, to which President
Jeff Modzelewski responded with his thanks in a letter in French on behalf of The Laffite Society.

The President reported that Laffite researcher Gary Fretz from Fort Lauderdale, FL has offered to submit an article for publication in The Laffite Society Chronicles on his recent research based on newspaper articles from authentic South American sources on the death of Jean Laffite, reported to have occurred during a sea battle in the early months of 1823. The President further stated that prior to publication of the Fretz article, an editorial committee will have the opportunity to review it. Also, at some future date, as a collateral project, the President suggested the Society might want to publish an article summarizing important research contributions by its major researchers, centering around the evidence on file for Jean Laffite’s survival and life in anonymity as a resident of St. Louis, MO and Alton, IL.

According to Dr. Reginald Wilson, Advisory Board Member Pam Keyes of Miami, OK now has a Web Page focusing on court cases involving Pierre Laffite from 1800-1855, as well as on members of the New Orleans Association.

Historian Jean L. Epperson read to members an e-mail letter from Laffite researcher Gary Fretz in which he referred to a newspaper article quoted from the Gaceta de Colombia from April 20, 1823, stating that Jean Laffite was killed in a battle with two Spanish vessels off Omoa, Honduras, February 4, 1823. According to Mr. Fretz in his e-mail letter, the above information was provided to him in August, ’01 in an English translation by Paula Covington, Latin American and Iberian Bibliographer at Vanderbilt University. Subsequent to receipt of this initial English translation, Mr. Fretz forwarded a copy of the original news article in Spanish to President Jeff Modzelewski who provided a second English translation which was essentially in agreement with the Vanderbilt version.

Following receipt of the news article in Spanish, an exchange of correspondence occurred briefly between the President and Mr. Fretz on the possible meaning of the word “Viento” as used in the news article to refer to the coastal site near which the sea battle may have occurred - “Viento de Omoa.” It was suggested, but not decided conclusively, that the word “viento” may have referred to a sea term describing a course or direction, or a “land breeze” possibly, rather than to mean “wind” as is its usual meaning.

In further reference to the description of the Spanish schooner given in the translation, Laffite Society member and nautical archeologist Tom Oertling offered the opinion by e-mail that the word “coliza” (or “colisa”) in the Spanish text might refer to a “pivot gun” located amidships rather than at the stern of the ship.

Mr. Fretz further stated in his August e-mail correspondence that he had sent an inquiry on the newspaper report of Laffite’s death in 1823 to the Latin American section at Duke University’s library, suggesting that more information on the fate of the famous privateer, who was also venerated as a revolutionary in the struggle for independence, might be available from Colombian, South American naval logs.

For members’ interest, Mr. Fretz also forwarded to Ms. Jean L. Epperson a copy of his biography.

Advisory Board Member and a leading Laffite Society researcher Dr. Reginald Wilson provided a brief oral summary of major goals accomplished to date by Laffite Society researchers since inception of the Society in July, 1994.

Dr. Wilson also reported that Susan Baker Hunger, Member-at-Large, had searched the Baltimore, MD marriage certificate files via the Internet for evidence of a marriage contracted in 1831 between Emma Mortimer and Jean Laffite. The marriage was stated to have occurred, according to Laffite in his controversial “journal” alleged to have been written under his own hand. The search produced no findings. Dr. Wilson suggested that the marriage might have taken place in South Carolina, possibly in Charleston. Ms. Hunger offered to continue an Internet search.

Advisory Board Member R. Dale Olson mentioned possible future travel sites in association with Laffite Society research interests: 1) Soto la Marina, MX; 2) Veracruz, MX; 3) Yucatan Peninsula, MX; 4) Bordeaux, France; 5) Cartagena, Colombia, S.A.; 6) Havana, Cuba; 7) Palacios, TX; 8) Matagorda Bay, TX; 9) New Orleans, LA (annual Louisiana Historical Society meeting in January).

November 13, 2001

The President called the meeting to order with welcoming remarks to members and the many visitors in attendance, followed by a brief description of the Society’s goals and interests for the benefit
of students from Prof. Alex Pratt’s class and other visitors present.

After the opening remarks, Professor Alex Pratt from College of the Mainland at Texas City, TX, gave a talk on the history of slavery in Texas and on Galveston Island, in association with the Society’s interest in the smuggling and selling of slaves practiced in the 19th century by Jean and Pierre Laffite and their contemporaries. To accompany his talk, Professor Pratt provided the audience with copies of early newspaper articles describing conditions of life, slavery laws and codes as they existed in Texas at that time.

Minutes of the October 9, 2001 meeting were approved as read to members by the Secretary.

Treasurer, Jerry Eubank, reported the current balance on today’s date as $3,077.91.

The President reported that Laffite Society author and researcher Robert C. Vogel and his wife Kathleen Taylor Vogel had visited the island for several days the previous week.

Laffite Society member and researcher Gary Fretz from Ft. Lauderdale, FL mentioned in a recent e-mail letter the possibility of arranging for two Spanish translators to assist in research in South America on news articles in that country relating to the reported death of Jean Laffite in a sea battle in 1823.

A short discussion was taken up on a previous proposal to make some funds available for researchers. Parliamentarian Diane Olson suggested that, since the Society’s financial resources are limited, requests for funding could be considered on an individual basis for short-term projects and a cap placed on funds permitted for use.

Richard Prather, Member-at-Large, suggested that, instead of offering honoraria to potential speakers, the Society might consider giving an honorary membership.

In a recent e-mail letter to Jean L. Epperson, Laffite researcher Gary Fretz reported that, beneath layers of paint on the canvas of the work known as The Gambler, attributed to Jarvis, the name of “Ames” was uncovered.

Member-at-Large Richard Prather gave to the Secretary for the archive an article dated Sunday, November 4, 2001, from The Houston Chronicle concerning a sunken vessel found in a little known lake off of the Trinity River, 35 miles from Galveston, long believed by some to have belonged to Jean Laffite. State marine archeologists want to officially examine the site. Laffite Society researchers Jean L. Epperson and Robert C. Vogel were quoted in the article.

Due to time limits, a reading and discussion of the article was deferred until the next regularly scheduled general meeting.

Discussion followed on plans for travel in the spring along the Texas coast to Palacios, TX, to Soto la Marina, MX, and, possibly, to Veracruz, MX. Third Vice-President and Special Events Chairman Kathy Modzelewski will gather information on these areas to present at a future meeting.

Instead of the regular meeting, The Laffite Society will hold its annual holiday party and covered dish buffet at The Elband Gallery on Tuesday, December 11, 2001.

December 11, 2001
The Society celebrated its annual Holiday Party and no meeting was held.