The Laffite Society hosted its annual holiday social on Sunday evening, December 15, 2002. The setting was the Maceo Bakery and Buccaneer Rooms on the second floor of the historic Jockusch Building. This venue is located at the corner of 21st St. and Strand in downtown Galveston, and was generously made available for the evening by its owners, Laffite Society co-founders Dale and Diane Olson.

In past years the Laffite Society holiday social has generally been organized as a pot-luck event publicized to members only, with a few non-member guests invited informally by word of mouth. The Society voted this year to make the event a more formal, catered affair, to be held in an elegant ambience, with dinner tables set with linen, place cards and candles, and with printed invitations sent to a combination of members and non-members. Why was this change made?

The decision partially resulted, perhaps, from a tacit need not only to forestall the usual winter doldrums but to take extra measures to dispel the gloom of current national and world events—the permanent change in perspective occasioned by the 9/11/01 terror attack, continued financial market ills, the threat of renewed war between this country and the mid-East, etc.

In addition, however, although the Laffite Society has never aggressively pursued self-promotion, it has of late increasingly been recognized by other research groups, such as the Paul Revere (Golden Triangle) Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution in Port Arthur, and the Texas Map Society headquartered in Arlington, both of which Laffite Society members have recently been invited to address. Perhaps in a self-acknowledgment of the merits its activities might hold for other civic and research groups, the decision was made to invite, in addition to all members, a significant number of non-members, selected from groups such as the Galveston Parks Board, the Galveston Historical Foundation, and the Rosenberg Library, and others of the community with a known interest in history.

The event this year was envisioned and engineered by Laffite Society First Vice-President Jim Nonus, assisted by Second Vice President Mike Eubank, Treasurer Jerry Eubank, Past President Dale Olson, Parliamentarian Diane Olson, Past President Kathy Modzelewski, and President Jeff Modzelewski. Eye-catching invitations sported a black cover overlaid with a silver skull and crossbones, and a delicious meal was catered by Cathy and Tommy Townsend of Galveston Connections, Inc. More than seventy attendees enjoyed an evening that went far longer—and merrily so—than the published time of 7:00 – 9:00 P.M.

Arriving guests were met curbside by the elegant and exotic Jim Nonus, a.k.a. Jean Lafitte, attired in wig, period costume, and piratical accoutrements. They then made their way upstairs to the second floor vestibule, where a professional photographer stood at the ready to take portraits. The attendees then passed southward into the Maceo Bakery, where bartender Chris Fleming served up a variety of libations, among which was the famous—depending upon the number consumed, one might say infamous—New Orleans Sazerac Cocktail.

The spacious room filled quickly as guests milled about sipping their drinks. Ladies in seasonal finery with some of their gentlemen escorts in black tie; the beautiful décor and furnishings of a historic building just recently remodeled; the holiday season; all combined to set the proper mood.

Too soon, the cocktail hour was brought to a close by a summons to the north end of the building to dine in the beautiful Buccaneer Room. Dale and
Diane Olson had given much thought to the seating of guests, and likely all found themselves seated at a table with both old friends and new acquaintances and of both like and novel interests. While the main course was to be served buffet-style, salads and desserts were to be served at the individual tables. In short order guests found their names on place cards created by Kathy Modzelewski and were seated.

In preparation for a reprise (suggested by Jim and Dale) of an introductory ceremony witnessed at the Louisiana Historical Society’s annual banquet several years ago, Dale, Diane, Kathy, and Jeff spent several hours in the days preceding the social, capturing a comment or two with which to introduce each attendee. As guests ate their salads, Jeff stood at the front of the room and publicly introduced all, person by person or couple by couple, table by table.

The process, which might sound tedious to one who did not witness it, is on the contrary a not-so-time-consuming, delightful way to make all feel special and welcome. To paraphrase one attendee’s remarks afterwards, “Far from being bored, as I heard the interesting things said about all the people in the room, I wanted to get up and go sit at all the different tables to talk to everyone.”

The close of introductions dovetailed with the end of the salad course, and guests arose to proceed to the buffet line for their main course. After the delicious meal, dessert and coffee were served at each table, and as attendees turned their attention to these, Jim a.k.a. Jean Laffite stood to remind all of the chance to have photographs taken—with or without our daring corsair in the shot, and that all were welcome to adjourn anew to the Maceo Bakery for more wine, beer, and Sazerac Cocktails at the close of the meal.

Jim then reintroduced Jeff, who spoke for some ten minutes to tell the group something of the Laffite Society, its focus, the time and place of its monthly meetings, and the availability of membership applications that very night. Jeff then turned the proceedings over to Dale.

The audience response attested to the value and interest of Dale’s remarks. The group, instead of becoming restless after cocktails and a full meal and with the evening already prolonged past its 9:00 P.M. published close, sat rapt as Dale spoke of the serious side of the Laffite Society: the research conducted by many of its members. Without notes, Dale outlined the particular focus of the efforts of perhaps a dozen Laffite Society members. By the end of his presentation, one could well have experienced two proverbial effects in the room—the sound of a pin dropping, and listeners knocked over with a feather. Dale concluded his remarks by thanking all for their attendance, and the group adjourned to the Maceo Bakery for the promised after-dinner drinks.

And so the three portions of the evening’s non-edible, non-potable entertainment occurred just as desired. Jim in his Jean Laffite incarnation created a fun and festive first impression for arriving guests; Jeff made the attendees feel truly special and welcome as they began dinner; and Dale, during dessert and coffee, gave the audience an under-the-surface glimpse at the knowledge and effort put forth by members in their research endeavors.

Within a half-hour, most had departed the premises or would soon so do, and little remained of the 2002 Laffite Society holiday social except for memories and the stratagems already hatching for next year’s event!
Dorothy Karilanovic, LaFite Society secretary, and Many Green, orchestra leader

Bill Foley, member, Don C. Marler, editor of The Chronicles and Mike Eubank, second vice-president
Sheldon Kendall, avocational archaeologist and Sandra Pollon, ceramics expert.

Betty Wilson and Sybil Marler, members and supporters