WHO WERE THESE GUYS?
SOME OF THE LESSER CHARACTERS IN THE STORY OF THE LAFFITES

Robert C. Vogel

AMIGONI

The corsair Julius Caesar Amigoni (sometimes spelled Amizoni) was captain of the Baratarian privateer Aguila when it cleared the port of New Orleans in February 1815 with an illegal cargo of arms. Before leaving Louisiana waters, Amigoni handed over command of the Aguila (also known as the Petit Milan) to Vincent Gambi, who was AWOL from Jackson’s army that had recently defended New Orleans against the British. Gambi sailed the vessel to Boquilla de las Piedras on the coast of Mexico, where the cargo was turned over to the Mexican revolutionary army. On its return voyage, the privateer was seized by U.S. authorities for violations of the Neutrality Act. Amigoni returned to running arms between New Orleans and Mexico, sometimes as captain of Petit Milan, but his name disappears from the historical record after 1818. Like so many of the Baratarian corsairs, he was a native of Italy and “Julius Caesar” may have been a nomme de guerre.

ANAYA

Juan Pablo Anaya was born in Lagos, Nueva Galicia (Jalisco), in 1785, and was a village priest when the Mexican revolution broke out in 1810. A follower of the revolutionary priest Manuel Hidalgo y Costilla, in 1813 Father Anaya attained the rank of general and became a trusted subordinate of Juan Nepomuceno Rosains (1782-1839), who commanded the rebel forces around Veracruz. In the summer of 1814, General Rosains opened negotiations with the Baratarians to provide arms and naval support for the insurgents, and in September the Mexican Congress dispatched Anaya as the head of their mission to the United States. Arriving in Louisiana just in time for the British invasion, Anaya served as a volunteer on Andrew Jackson’s staff during the Battle of New Orleans. Spanish agents reported that he was involved with Pierre Laffite and others in organizing a seaborne attack against Tampico; he also had dealings with the filibuster Jose Alvarez de Toledo (1779-1858), who wrote the Mexican Congress on 10 February 1815 requesting Anaya’s removal. Very soon afterwards, Anaya became disillusioned with the mission and on 18 March 1815 he announced his intention to return to Mexico, where he retired from revolutionary activities, but later served in the government after independence. He died in Mexico City in 1850.

BLANQUE

Jean Blanque is best known as the confidential bearer of Laffite’s letters to Governor William C. C. Claiborne in September 1814. Born in France, he was a cousin of the colonial prefect Clement de Laussat, whom he accompanied to New Orleans in 1803. According to a contemporary source, Blanque had played a small part in the French Revolution of 1789. After the Louisiana Purchase, he settled in New Orleans and prospered as a merchant, trading in slaves and other merchandise. After his marriage to Marie Delphine McCarthy in 1808, he served in the territorial government of Louisiana, was a delegate to the state constitutional convention, and was elected to the state house of representatives. He was one of the members of the Committee for Public Safety formed to organize the defense of New Orleans in 1814—and was therefore a logical choice as the intermediary between the Baratarians and the Claiborne administration. Blanque appears to have had no further connection with the Baratarians after 1814. He died in New Orleans in 1816. His wife married Dr. Nicolas Lalaurie and became notorious for her cruel treatment of their slaves.
Champlin

Guy R. Champlin was one of a relatively small number of American privateers who operated out of Galveston. His name appears frequently in letters written by Pierre and Jean Laffite that are preserved in the Cuban archives. Champlin, who is usually identified in contemporary documents as a New Yorker, was captain of the armed schooner General Artigas (alias Minerva) when it arrived at Galveston with Louis Aury's squadron in the spring of 1817. He appears to have frequented New Orleans during this period, but left the Gulf of Mexico sometime late in 1818, possibly as a member of Aury's expedition to Amelia Island, Florida. He may have been a relative of Stephen Champlin (1789-1870) of Rhode Island, who served as an officer in the U.S. Navy and performed heroic deeds at the Battle of Lake Erie (10 September 1813).

Chew

Beverly Chew played a leading role in the suppression of piracy and smuggling during his term of office as Collector of the Port of New Orleans (1817-1829). Born in Virginia in 1773, Chew immigrated to New Orleans two years prior to the Louisiana Purchase and became a partner in the firm of Chew & Relf, one of the city's biggest mercantile houses. He also served as New Orleans postmaster and president of the local branch of the Bank of the United States. Chew's reports to the Secretary of the Treasury contain detailed intelligence on events at Galveston in 1817-1820, when he was a staunch opponent of the Laffite brothers, Aury, Humbert, et al., and did everything in his power to drive them out of the Gulf of Mexico. When he died in 1851, he was one of the richest men in Louisiana. (It is noted that that a John Chew of Baltimore signed on with General Xavier Mina's ill-fated Mexican filibuster in 1816, was promoted to the rank of lieutenant of infantry, and apparently perished during the Soto la Marina campaign in 1817. The nature of this individual's relationship, if any, to the Collector of New Orleans is not known.)

Davezac

Auguste Genevieve Valentin Davezac was born in 1780 at Aux Cayes, in what is now the southern part of Haiti, the son of a well-to-do planter. Educated in Europe, he joined the Creole exodus to the United States during the slave rebellion in Santo Domingo and settled in New Orleans, where he read law and was admitted to the bar on 2 March 1813. His sister Louise was married to Edward Livingston (1764-1837), who was his mentor in the law, although not a law partner as such. Davezac specialized in criminal defense and from time to time represented Baratarian privateers and smugglers in the federal district court. In his memoir, Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres, the merchant Vincent Nolte writes that he was frequently seen in the company of the Laffite brothers, though his name does not appear in court records as their attorney. After being named to the Committee for Public Safety in 1814, Davezac served as a volunteer aide-de-camp at Andrew Jackson's headquarters during the Battle of New Orleans. He entered the diplomatic service in 1831 and died in New York City in 1851.

DeForest

David Curtis DeForest was born in Connecticut in 1774 and established a business in Buenos Aires in 1806. By 1814, he was an active supporter of the revolutionary government of the United Provinces of South America and outfitted several privateers during 1815-1818. In 1818 the rebels appointed him consul general to the United States and he took up residence in Baltimore that same year. A controversial figure, he intrigued with various foreign and domestic officials to secure U.S. support for the new republic. Late in 1818 he was in direct contact with Pierre Laffite regarding possible arms purchases and filibustering expeditions against the Spanish dominions, though nothing became of these schemes. When he was recalled by the government Buenos Aires in 1823, DeForest chose to retire.
to his home in New Haven, where he died in 1825. Samuel F. B. Morse painted a well-known portrait of Mrs. DeForest, who donated $5,000 for Yale University’s first undergraduate scholarship in 1823.

**DESFARGES**

Few details are known of the life of Jean Desfarges, master of the Galveston privateer schooner *Le Brave* (Bravo) that was captured by U.S. revenue cutters in September 1819. According to district court records and contemporary newspaper accounts, Desfarges was born ca. 1798 in Bordeaux and was well educated. He and his crew were condemned to death for piracy on 22 November 1819. Desfarges and his lieutenant were hanged aboard a U.S. naval barge at New Orleans on 25 May 1820. According to newspaper accounts, Desfarges attempted to commit suicide before the sentence could be carried out by jumping overboard, but marines pulled him out of the water and brought him to the yardarm. He was perhaps the first person executed under the Act of Congress (5 March 1819) making piracy a capital crime.

**DICK**

John Dick was born in Ireland in 1788 and emigrated to Virginia ca. 1802, eventually settling in New Orleans in the fall of 1811. He read law and was admitted to the bar in March 1812. While in private practice, he represented Master Commandant Daniel T. Patterson (1786-1839) and Colonel George T. Ross (d. 1816) in their claims against the prizes taken in the raid on Barataria in September 1814. At the same time, he was seeking appointment to the office of United States Attorney for the New Orleans District, replacing John R. Grymes. He was confirmed by the Senate in October 1814, but did not take office until February 20, 1815. It was Dick who carried out the presidential pardon for the Baratarians; he also prosecuted Andrew Jackson for contempt of court in March 1815. Sometime during the spring of 1815, Dick fought a duel with Grymes, ostensibly over the latter’s ties to the Baratarian pirates; both men were wounded and Dick walked with a limp for the rest of his life. After Judge Dominick Hall’s death on December 19, 1820, Dick was elevated to the federal bench and presided over the district court in New Orleans until his death from tuberculosis on April 23, 1824.

**FATIO**

Little is known regarding the family and early career of Felipe Fatio, who arrived in New Orleans in May 1817, as the vice consul of the government of Spain. In this capacity, he dealt directly with the Laffite brothers and other secret agents and endeavored to defeat the King’s enemies. In June 1819, King Ferdinand VII granted him the order of the Cross of Isabella the Catholic in recognition of his service to the crown. Fatio died in New Orleans on 4 February 1820.

**GRAHAM**

Born in Dumfries, Virginia, ca. 1772, George Graham graduated from Columbia University in New York City in 1790 and practiced law in Virginia, where he also served as colonel of the Fairfax Light Horse during the War of 1812. His older brother, John Graham (1744-1820) was a diplomat. In 1814 he was appointed chief clerk in the War Department, where he was later interim Secretary of War (16 October 1816 to 9 December 1817). A specialist in Indian affairs, Graham earned a reputation as a successful “trouble-shooter,” which is the reason Secretary of State John Quincy Adams tapped him for the secret mission to Galveston in the summer of 1818. Graham received his written appointment as State Department agent on 2 June 1818 and arrived at Galveston sometime in late August. He met with Jean Laffite at Galveston and later communicated with Pierre Laffite in New Orleans before returning to Washington, where he personally delivered his report to Adams on 20 November 1818. Although the Monroe Administration was none too pleased by his performance as a secret agent, Graham was still part of the inner circle of government. He became president of
the Washington branch of the Bank of the United States and in 1823 he was appointed Commissioner of the General Land Office, a prized political appointment. Graham died in Washington, D.C., in 1830 and was buried in the Congressional Cemetery. His son, George Mason Graham (1807-1891) settled in Louisiana, where he is known as the “Father of Louisiana State University.”

GRYMES

John Randolph Grymes was a controversial figure throughout his adult life. Born in Orange County, Virginia, in 1786, he read law before immigrating to Louisiana in 1808, where he became one of the original members of the Louisiana bar (admitted 2 March 1813) and was for a time a partner in Edward Livingston’s law office. On 29 November 1811 he was confirmed as United States Attorney in New Orleans and ably served in that capacity until he resigned in October 1814 to become the attorney for several of the Baratarians. His conduct in this matter led him to fight a duel with the new district attorney, John Dick, in the spring of 1815; both men were wounded, Grymes receiving a gunshot to the calf. (The story of his $10,000 fee for defending the Laffite brothers, told many years after the events of 1814-1815, is probably apocryphal.) In 1822, Grymes married Susanna Bosque, the widow of former governor William C. C. Claiborne. Grymes fought several duels, instigated a gunfight on the floor of the state house of representatives, and was a notorious gambler. He died in New Orleans in 1854.

HALL

Warren DeWitt Clinton Hall was born in North Carolina in 1788 and immigrated to Louisiana ca. 1809. He practiced law in Natchitoches before joining the Gutierrez-Magee filibustering expedition to Texas in 1812. Offended by the execution of the senior Spanish officers taken prisoner at the Battle of Rosilio (19 March 1813), he resigned his commission in the Republican Army of the North and returned to Louisiana. After the Battle of New Orleans, Hall joined the Texas expedition of filibuster Henry Perry (d. 1817) and was part of the group shipwrecked at Bolivar Point in November 1815. In 1817, he sailed from Galveston with Colonel Perry as part of General Xavier Mina’s (1789-1818) expedition to Soto la Marina, but apparently he did not accompany them on their ill-fated march into the interior in the spring of 1817. His whereabouts between that time and the spring of 1819 are not known, but he surfaced as an associate of the filibuster James Long (1793-1822) when that individual attempted to liberate Texas. It was while serving as a member of General Long’s second Texas expedition that Hall became personally acquainted with Jean Lafitte at Galveston in February or March 1820. Hall was elected vice president of Long’s short-lived government in 1820-1821, but returned to Rapides Parish in Louisiana after Long’s expedition against La Bahia fell apart. In 1828 he returned to Texas with his wife Julietta and settled in Brazoria. He was made a colonel in the republican army during the Texas Revolution and later served as Secretary of War under the Republic of Texas. Retiring from public life, Hall moved to Galveston Island, where he died in 1867.

HERRERA

Like Hidalgo and Morelos, Jose Manuel de Herrera was a priest who took up arms against the Spanish king in 1811. He represented Tecpan at the Congress of Chilpaning in September 1813 and was a signer of the Constitution of Apatzingan on 22 October 1814. On 14 July 1815, the Mexican Congress appointed Herrera its minister plenipotentiary to the United States, replacing Juan Pablo Anaya (1785-1849). He rendezvoused with Vincent Gambi at the little port of Boquilla de Piedras and arrived in New Orleans on 1 November 1815, with 29,000 pesos to purchase arms. Herrera went to Galveston with Louis-Michel Aury (1788-1821) and officially declared the island to be a part of the Republic of Mexico on 12 September 1816. When the Laffite faction accomplished its coup
d'état, he affirmed their legitimacy as agents of the Mexican revolution on 15 April 1817 and quickly returned to New Orleans. Herrera was back in Mexico by 1818 and made his peace with the royalists. After independence, he held a minor post in the Iturbide government and retired from public life in 1827.

HOLMES

Andrew Hunter Holmes was the younger brother of David Holmes, the first governor of Mississippi. He was licensed to practice law in Natchez in 1809 at the age of 18; the following year, he killed an army officer in a duel on the west bank of the Mississippi River. At the beginning of the War of 1812, Holmes was a captain in the Mississippi militia; entering federal service, he was sent to Louisiana with a detachment of the 24th Infantry to help interdict smuggling and privateering. On the night of 15-16 November 1812, a patrol led by Holmes captured several pirogues loaded with contraband in a bayou below New Orleans, resulting in the first prosecution of Pierre and Jean Laffite in the district court. Holmes went on to serve on the Great Lakes frontier, where on August 4, 1814, he was killed in action while leading an attack against the British fort on Fort Mackinac; after the war, the fort was renamed Fort Holmes. The names of Holmesville, Mississippi, and Holmes County, Ohio, were also named in his honor.

HUMBERT

A native of Rouvary, France, Jean Joseph Amable Humbert was born in 1755 and was a humble tradesman until the French Revolution. He enlisted in the army as a private ca. 1789 and rose quickly through the ranks as one of France's best combat leaders. He fought in numerous campaigns against the Germans and Austrians and was promoted to major general in 1794 and lieutenant general in 1798. Humbert commanded the expeditionary force sent against Ireland in 1798 but the invasion was repulsed. In 1802 he commanded a division in the army sent to occupy Haiti, where he served as military governor of Port-au-Prince until the remnants of the French army were withdrawn in 1804. Afterwards, Humbert was widely suspected to be the lover of Pauline Bonaparte (1780-1825), Napoleon's sister and the widow of his former commander in Haiti. He was committed to internal exile in Brittany but fled to the United States to avoid imprisonment, arriving in Philadelphia sometime in the early part of 1813. Setting out for Texas, he apparently arrived too late to participate in the Battle of Medina (18 August 1813), but by the late fall of 1813 he was the titular head of the filibusters forming up in Louisiana. With his Baratarian associates, Humbert spearheaded the effort to open up a link between the Texas filibusters and the Mexican Congress and visited the rebel port of Nautl on board Dominique You's schooner Tigre in June 1814. After narrowly avoiding capture during Patterson and Ross' raid on Grande Terre (16-23 September 1814), he joined the Americans in the defense of Louisiana against the British, where he earned the confidence of Andrew Jackson despite the fact that American troops refused to serve under Humbert's command. Humbert was the only Baratarian to formally obtain his presidential pardon, which he used to escape prosecution in district court in May 1815. A notorious filibuster, he remained active in Mexican revolutionary schemes until 1821, often working in partnership with the Laffite brothers, much to the consternation of the United States government. He was indicted for piracy in July 1820, but the case was dismissed. Afterwards, he may have briefly taught college in New Orleans, where he was popular among the members of that city's French émigré community. He died there on 3 January 1823.

JONES

Randall Jones left behind one of the handful of authentic, eyewitness accounts of Galveston Island under the Laffites. Born in Georgia in 1786, Captain Jones fought Indians in Alabama under Andrew Jackson in 1812-1813 before he joined the Republican Army of the North in Texas.
After the Battle of Medina River (18 August 1813), he became an Indian trader and had a store in Nacogdoches; it was during one of his trading trips that he visited Galveston in 1818. His brother, James W. Jones, was a member of James Long's expedition in 1819. Randall Jones was a member of the Austin Colony, settling on the Brazos River in 1822.

KEARNY

Lawrence Kearny was born in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, in 1789. He was appointed midshipman in the U.S. Navy in 1807 and apprenticed on gunboats in New York as well as the frigates Constitution and President. He first served on board the U.S.S. Enterprise as a junior officer in 1810-1812 and after his promotion to lieutenant in 1813 he commanded small vessels in coastal waters. Lieutenant Kearny was placed in command of Enterprise at the end of the War of 1812 and served on her until 1821. In December 1819, Enterprise departed from New York to cruise against pirates in the Gulf of Mexico and the western Caribbean. On orders of the commander of the U.S. naval forces in the Gulf of Mexico, on 27 February 1820 Enterprise visited Galveston to observe Laffite's preparations to abandon that place. Stories of Commander Kearny's dealings with Jean Laffite are largely apochrophal - his official report (dated 7 March 1820) makes no mention of going ashore to meet with the pirate and the only purported eye-witness account is an anonymous magazine piece published almost twenty years later. Under Kearny, Enterprise patrolled in Cuban waters and made several captures. He left the ship late in 1821 and took command of U.S.S. Warren. (Enterprise was subsequently wrecked off Little Curacao on 9 July 1823.) Kearny was promoted to master commandant in 1825 and saw duty in the Mediterranean. He was posted captain in 1832 and later commanded the East Indian squadron before retiring from the service in 1861. He died at the family home in Perth Amboy in 1868. Lawrence Kearny was a cousin of the army officer and explorer Stephen Watts Kearny (1794-1848) and was also related to Civil War general Philip Kearny (1815-1862).

LAFON

Batheleme Lafon was born in France in 1769 and migrated to New Orleans ca. 1790, where he found work as an architect, civil engineer, and cartographer. In the 1790s he pursued various interests, including ownership of a theater in New Orleans. Under the American regime, Lafon received several commissions to produce accurate maps and plans, including his famous 1806 map of Louisiana. Shortly after the Battle of New Orleans, Lafon became an active privateer under the auspices of the Mexican Congress; when the Laffite party took control of Galveston on 15 April 1817 the new "government" was sworn into office on board Lafon's armed schooner, the Carmelita, whose owner acted as secretary of the proceedings. A few weeks later, Lafon wrote to the royalist governor of Texas requesting permission to settle on the Neches River, but nothing came of this scheme. On 7 July 1817, Lafon and Jean Laffite were indicted for failing to pay duty on some illegally imported pivot guns. Shortly after this episode, Lafon appears to have retired from privateering. While living in New Orleans, he was stricken with yellow fever and died on 29 September 1820. Lafon left no wife, but provided a legacy for his African American mistress and their natural children.

LAPORTE

Jean Baptise Laporte was born in France in 1786 and was the chancellor in the French consulate at New Orleans in 1811. He may have been related by marriage to the well-known Baratarian privateer Renato Beluche (1780-1860). He probably enlisted in the Battalion of New Orleans for service in the Battle of New Orleans. In 1817, Beverly Chew identified him as the master of the unregistered vessel Franklin, which was used to supply the pirate stronghold at Galveston Island. (The Rosenberg Library in Galveston owns a purported letter of marque dated 2 April 1818, issued by "La Porta" for a vessel called the Princess, and a license dated 15
May 1818 bearing the signature of Jean Laffite, authorizing Jao de la Porta to trade with the Karankawa Indians.) In 1825 he was one of the three creditors who came forward to take ownership of the old Maspero's exchange in New Orleans. A gentleman of means, he died in 1838.

McINTOSH

James McKay McIntosh was born in 1792 in Sunbury, Georgia. He joined the U.S. Navy and was appointed midshipman in 1811, serving on gunboats during the War of 1812. Sometime after his promotion to lieutenant in 1818, McIntosh was made first lieutenant on the U.S.S. Firebrand, the former Baratarian armed schooner Dorada (captured at Grande Terre in September 1814 and purchased by the Navy). He may have been aboard Firebrand during its secret mission to Mexico in 1815-1816. McIntosh was not aboard Firebrand when that vessel was wrecked by a hurricane off Pass Christian on 28 July 1819. While on half-pay in New Orleans awaiting a new assignment, he volunteered to sail on U.S.S. Lynx during its cruise against pirates in the western Gulf of Mexico during October and November 1819. It was in this capacity that he participated in the capture of pirate boats and was dispatched to parley with Jean Laffite at Galveston. (His service record makes no mention of this incident, but he is mentioned in the official dispatches of Lynx's captain.) McIntosh wrote an account of his visit to Laffite that was published in the Knickerbocker Magazine in 1847. After his return from Galveston, on 6 June 1820 McIntosh was appointed lieutenant on U.S.S. Enterprise, which he joined at Charleston. McIntosh remained in the Navy until 1857, retiring with the rank of captain. He died in 1860. His literary contribution in 1847 may have been influenced by his half-sister, Maria McIntosh (1803-1878), who was a successful author.

MITCHELL

A native of Bath, England, William Wilson Mitchell was born ca. 1784 and may have seen service in both the British and Spanish navies before coming to the Americas; it was also rumored that he had been one of the mutineers on board H.M.S. Hermione. Mitchell's early career in the Gulf of Mexico is obscure, but he may have served in the militia defending New Orleans against the British in 1814-1815. He was first indicted for piracy at New Orleans in May 1815, when he was the master of a privateer sailing under a Cartagena letter-of-marque. During the evacuation of Cartagena in December 1815, Mitchell's schooner Comet is alleged to have carried away many of the refugees, including the governor, whom Mitchell subsequently robbed and marooned. Comet was captured by U.S.S. Boxer off the Balize in April 1816, but Mitchell turned up in Galveston a few months later. As late as the fall of 1819, he was reported serving on the frigate Congress. Early in 1818 he was appointed to the command of U.S.S. Lynx, a schooner purchased by the Navy for the purpose of interdicting pirates. Based at Charleston, Lynx made several cruises in the western Caribbean under Madison's command. In the fall of 1819, Lynx was ordered to New Orleans and dispatched on a special mission to Galveston Island, where Madison captured several pirates and exchanged letters with Jean Laffite during 5-10 November 1819. His superior, Commodore Daniel T. Patterson (1786-1839), declared that the correspondence was "both curious and upsetting" and Madison was subsequently embarrassed when the letters were made public. (Madison did not go ashore at Galveston but sent his volunteer, James McIntosh [1792-1860], to meet with the pirates.) Lynx continued to operate against pirates in the Gulf, cruising off Galveston Island during May and June 1820, and in the waters off Cuba later that year. On 21 January 1821, she departed the naval station at St. Mary's, Georgia, bound for Jamaica but was never seen again.

MADISON

John R. Madison was appointed midshipman in the U.S. Navy during the War of 1812 and made the lieutenants' list on 24 July 1813 while serving on the frigate Congress. Early in 1818 he was appointed to the command of U.S.S. Lynx, a schooner purchased by the Navy for the purpose of interdicting pirates. Based at Charleston, Lynx made several cruises in the western Caribbean under Madison's command. In the fall of 1819, Lynx was ordered to New Orleans and dispatched on a special mission to Galveston Island, where Madison captured several pirates and exchanged letters with Jean Laffite during 5-10 November 1819. His superior, Commodore Daniel T. Patterson (1786-1839), declared that the correspondence was "both curious and upsetting" and Madison was subsequently embarrassed when the letters were made public. (Madison did not go ashore at Galveston but sent his volunteer, James McIntosh [1792-1860], to meet with the pirates.) Lynx continued to operate against pirates in the Gulf, cruising off Galveston Island during May and June 1820, and in the waters off Cuba later that year. On 21 January 1821, she departed the naval station at St. Mary's, Georgia, bound for Jamaica but was never seen again.
robbing vessels off Santiago de Cuba in a rowboat. A longtime associate of Pierre Laffite, he was master of the schooner Pegasus that carried Laffite from Galveston to New Orleans in March 1820. According to newspaper accounts, Mitchell died on 1 May 1821 on Great Corn Island, off the coast of Nicaragua. Printing the notice of his death a Charleston newspaper reported that those who knew him best “say that many piracies have been charged to him which he did not commit, and that his purse was always open to the distressed.”

PICORNELL

Juan Bautista Mariano de Picornell y Gomilla was born in Caracas in 1739 and was a practicing physician when he became a revolutionary in the 1790s. In 1797 he was a co-conspirator with Manuel Gaul and Jose Maria Espana in an unsuccessful plot to bring about a revolution in Venezuela. In 1813 he appeared in Philadelphia, where he was befriended by Ira Allen and became involved in the revolutionary plots against Texas. He was a colleague of the filibuster Jose Alvarez de Toledo (1799-1858), but after Toledo’s defeat at the Battle of Medina River in 1813, Picornell withdrew to New Orleans, where late in 1813 he was elected president of the provincial government of the Interior Provinces of Mexico (Hombres Libres de la Provincias Internas de Mexico), with Pierre Laffite as a member of the council or junta. But he resigned the office on 12 February 1814 in order to seek reconciliation with the new Spanish government. (King Ferdinand VII, exiled by Napoleon in 1808, was restored to the throne in December 1813.) It was Dr. Picornell who recruited Pierre Laffite as a Spanish secret agent in 1815 and vouched for the Laffites’ loyalty to King Ferdinand VII. He practiced medicine for several years and published a pamphlet on sanitary conditions in New Orleans in 1819, wherein he expressed his bitterness towards the city and its people. Picornell immigrated to Cuba, where he was a university professor at the time of his death in 1825.

SAUVINET

New Orleans merchant Joseph Sauvinet was born in Bayonne, France, and lived in Haiti before migrating to Louisiana in ca. 1804. He was a financier and a confidential friend of Edward Livingston. In a letter to Andrew Jackson written on Christmas Day 1814, Livingston referred to Sauvinet as “a very intelligent man long concerned in the contraband trade.” On 16 July 1815, Sauvinet received the first privateer commission ever given by the Mexican Congress. During the summer and fall of 1816, Sauvinet was in contact with various revolutionaries in New Orleans. He was also a backer of Louis-Michel Aury’s expedition to Galveston Island, a fact he imparted in a letter to the rebel leader Bernardo de Gutierrez on 15 August 1816. Sauvinet personally does not appear to have had any direct connection to the Laffite brothers - Lyle Saxon’s portrayal of Sauvinet in Lafitte the Pirate is almost entirely fictionalized. His later career is not well documented. The Louisiana State Museum owns a portrait of him, painted by Jean Joseph Vaudenchamp ca. 1832.

TOLEDO

Jose Alvarez de Toledo y Dubois was born in Havana in 1799 and served as an officer in the Spanish Navy. Well known in liberal circles, he was elected as one of the deputies to the Spanish Cortez, where he was to represent the island of Santo Domingo, but his republican sympathies caused him to leave Cadiz with the assistance of the American consul. He surfaced in Philadelphia in September 1811 and set about lobbying U.S. government officials to gain support for a military expedition to liberate New Spain. It was at this time that he became associated with the Venezuelan revolutionary Juan Mariano Picornell (1739-1825) and the Mexican insurgent Jose Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara (1744-1841), who emerged as the co-commander, with William Augustus Magee (1789-1839), of the rebel army that invaded Texas from Louisiana in August 1812. Toledo left Philadelphia in December 1812 and arrived in Natchitoches the following
April. With the assistance of American agents, he successfully conspired to oust Gutierrez from command of the rebel army. Under Toledo’s leadership, the Republican Army of the North was destroyed by the royalists at the Battle of Medina River on 18 August 1813. Toledo escaped to Louisiana and arrived in New Orleans in early November 1814, where he was arrested and charged with violating U.S. neutrality. Released on his own recognizance, he participated in the Battle of New Orleans as a volunteer officer attached to Andrew Jackson’s staff. Afterwards, his activities with the Mexican revolutionaries and Baratarian privateers led the U.S. attorney at New Orleans to prosecute Toledo for planning illegal military expeditions against Spain. Once again, he was released on his own recognizance but failed to appear before the court— at the time, he was sailing to Boquilla de Piedras on board the Baratarian schooner Petit Milan to attend a conference with Mexican rebels. Toledo soon had a falling out with Humbert and the other filibusters and decided to abandon the Texas project. By the time he reached Washington, D.C., in August 1816, newspapers were reporting that he had been “purchased” by the royalists. In fact, Toledo was granted a full pardon by the king and entered government service as Madrid’s expert on North American affairs. He died in 1858.

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Many thanks to Jeff Modzelewski for his editing and verification of the translation of many documents from the Spanish versions over the past year and to Jean Epperson for all her help.

Research efforts continue and The Laffite Society will be updated as new information is uncovered. Assistance of any type is appreciated.

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