MAISON ROUGE ARTIFACT ANALYSIS

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On Saturday 10 January 2003, and again on Saturday 17 January, 122 boxes of archaeological materials taken from the legendary site of Laffite's "Maison Rouge" were examined by 12 members of the Houston Archaeological Society (HAS). The material was uncovered in 1984 during the first of two formal archaeological excavations at the site located at 1417 Avenue A on Galveston Island.

Following the excavation, the materials were removed to the Department of Archaeology at the University of Houston. Over the years several graduate students planned analysis as a basis for their advanced degrees in archaeology. No thesis or dissertation was ever completed and the boxes of artifacts remained stored at the University of Houston for many years.

Years later, several members of the Laffite Society retrieved the materials from the University, which no longer had space for storage, and relocated them to Galveston Island for storage.

The site at 1417 Avenue A has long been owned by Society members R. Dale and Diane Olson, so the archaeological artifacts became their property. Sheldon Kindal, President of the HAS organized the research effort this past January and recruited fellow archaeologists to assist in sorting the materials. Boxes were emptied one at a time with members cooperatively arriving at a "keep or discard" decision. Materials that appear to have significance were retained for cleaning and later accurate analysis by experts, and those with no obvious importance were stored for later reburial at the Maison Rouge site.

Unfortunately, no materials from "Level V", the depth at which Laffite era material would be expected to reside, were retrieved from the University of Houston. Over the many years of storage at the school, many students had access to the artifacts, and the location of the Level V material is unknown.

Little archaeological evidence directly connecting Jean or Pierre Laffite to the site has thus far been uncovered. There is however, an abundance of historical information which strongly suggests that the Laffite settlement included the site at 1417 Avenue A, and it is expected that some archaeological evidence will be established to link the site to an occupancy during the Laffite era, 1817-1820.

During the January, 2003 analysis workshop a large number of bottles in excellent condition were cataloged. Buttons, bone, numerous pieces of ceramics, an 1867 Indian Head U.S. Penny, and various other artifacts were taken for analysis.

On Saturday January 25, the archaeological crew retrieved the material deemed of little value and reburied the contents in two large trenches on the site of Maison Rouge. One pit was dug in an old cistern located on the East boundary of the site, approximately midway between the remnants of the old foundation and the alley. The second trench was dug immediately on the West side of the cistern, and adjoined its wall. Both pits were approximately five feet in depth.

Upon completion of the analysis, the archaeological work on the site will be complete. Remaining, and of considerable interest, is the possible excavation of at least one more pit to attempt retrieval of artifacts from the Level V depth. Also, Society Members continue to ascertain the location of the Level V material taken in the 1984 excavation.