MAISON ROUGE SITE ON 2003 GALVESTON HISTORIC HOMES TOUR

Jeff Modzelewski

On the first two weekends of each May, the Historical Foundation of Galveston, Texas, holds a Historic Homes Tour. The owners of eight or ten historic restored homes open their residences for viewing to the public. The event has been held continuously for more than a quarter of a century, and it showcases interest in one of Galveston’s greatest attractions: its large number of preserved late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century historic homes. It is a certainty that the annual Homes Tour attracts permanent residents to Galveston Island - my wife Kathy and I are living and breathing examples.

Often on these tours, a home that is not restored is included in the itinerary either as a “work in progress” or, if no restoration is anticipated or possible, simply for its historical value. The latter was the case of the purported site of Jean Laffite’s Maison Rouge, the owners of which, Laffite Society founders Dale and Diane Olson, offered it for this spring’s event.

Discussion of preparations at Laffite Society monthly meetings began last autumn when the group first learned that the site was accepted by the Galveston Historical Foundation as a stop on the tour. There was much to be done.

Extensive maintenance of the grounds was performed some weeks before the event, then again immediately prior to it, for weeds and brush grow quickly in Galveston’s hot and humid springs, and litter also accumulates at a rapid pace. Large flags related to Laffite and his era, produced in full color with materials impervious to the weather, were commissioned, and the standards upon which to mount them were procured and erected at the site before the tour. Some eight large placards were printed with text on different aspects of the Laffite lore and were displayed in the arches around the perimeter of the remaining structure.

A sampling of the artifacts unearthed in the archaeological digs conducted at the location in past years, now mounted for display with brief explanations, were arrayed on a table under an awning to protect them from the sun and possible inclement weather. Several of the common Laffite reference books, such as Jack C. Ramsay, Jr.’s Jean Laffite, Prince of Pirates, and Lyle Saxon’s Laffite the Pirate, were displayed at another table along with some photographs and Laffite Society membership forms.

The event was good exposure for the Laffite Society. Total visitors for all four days numbered approximately 280. The Laffite Society thanks those who volunteered their time to the event: Michael Bailey, Jean Epperson, Mike and Jerry Eubank, Dorothy Karilanovic, Sheldon Kindall and some colleagues from the Houston Archaeological Society, Jeff and Kathy Modzelewski, John Moen, Dale and Diane Olson, David Pettus, Dave and Ginny Roberts, Norm and Margie Sachnik, Robert Vogel, and Chris Woolwine.

The Society did not gain any members from the event, but volunteers were able to increase their familiarity with, and knowledge of, the site through conversation with other volunteers more knowledgeable than they, and reinforced both this knowledge and their public speaking talents by leading small groups around the area. The placards and flags will be available for a long time to come for other Laffite Society events.
The Maison Rouge site is located at 1417 Ave A, Galveston, Texas. The structural remnants seen in the photos are of a 19th century home built over the original structure.

The photos were taken during the Historic Homes Tour by Laffite Society member, Dan Cote.