The Laffite Connection...perhaps a good title for a film script, or a novel. But, for the Laffite Society, simply a mode of operation. In fact, this is precisely how the Laffite Society began, and has managed to grow, making connections, or networking, from the very beginning.

I had, for many years, been enamored of the legend of Laffite. Since early childhood, my mother told me about the privateer and we...
would drive by the old Hendricks Castle on Water Street (or Avenue A) in Galveston as she shared what she knew about Jean Laffite. For many years I have driven by the site just to stop, stare, and wonder. It always gave me a great feeling!

Later in life I began searching for books about the famous Laffites in New Orleans, not knowing that Rosenberg Library in Galveston would be such a rich source of information on my childhood hero.

Working in Houston, many of my friends and co-workers were aware of my interest in the Terror of the Gulf. This was, incidentally, the title of the first book I ever encountered on Jean Laffite.

Years later, my friend Brenda Gilbert shared an article she had read in Architectural Digest by Roger Kennedy concerning Bartholemy Lafon, an associate of the Laffites. Some months later I moved to Galveston and became acquainted with Louise Nichols of Yesterday’s Books. Telling her of my interest in collecting books on Laffite, Louise mentioned there were other collectors interested in the same material, but professionally she was not at liberty to provide their names without permission. I decided to share a copy of my latest find, the article by Kennedy, with whoever it was who had this similar interest.

For the first time I no longer felt alone in my endeavor and was very curious about meeting others with whom I might share information. Louise was instrumental in the network starting to form, as Brenda and my mother had been earlier.

The seed information passed to me in childhood was starting to grow, now searching for connections, and being fed and perpetuated by a host of others. The next connection, through Louise, was Dale Olson, and Diane, his wife. Now, the Laffite connection began to take on the characteristics of a road map, with connections being made much more rapidly.

At the center of this new information network is an energy connecting people with one another, sharing what we know about a man who set fire to his home and disappeared from the pages of history 175 years ago!

I looked as deep into Dale as he did me to learn why we shared this pursuit of Laffite. With no full answer to the question, the network continued to expand to others, most with outstanding ability to connect. Bruce and Mary Roberts, along with Randy Pace, were among the first to meet at the Olson’s home on Sealy in Galveston, as Dale, Diane, and I worked to develop the organization we know today.

Along with Randy soon came Dorothy McDonald Karilanovic, Lou MacBeth, Bill and Bernadette Foley, Kurt Voss, Jim and Margaret Epperson, a simpatico group of Laffittians with new energy and a strong interest in unearthing a piece of history about a man who networked not only in Galveston and New Orleans, but also had strong connections with the Spanish, French, Mexicans, Americans, and Argentinians. His name had been linked with many, and he proved to have had curious dealings with governors, presidents, generals, emperors, priests, dictators, pirates, landowners, privateers, thieves, and merchants.

The rich Laffite history in the Gulf of Mexico has now connected us with people like Don and Sybil Marler, Jean Epperson, Penny Clarke, Darlene Mott, Jonathan Gerland, and Robert Schaadt and, more recently, Betty and Dr. Reginald Wilson. Dale’s phone calls connected us with Bob Looper of Golden Meadow, Louisiana. Bob Looper connected us with Jean and Pat Landry of Grand Isle. Jean and Pat connected us with John Dameier on Grande Terre.

We became connected with Sally and Bill Reeves and Wanda Lee Dicky in New Orleans, and various booksellers and librarians, and perhaps at least one bartender at the Blacksmith Shop!
All of these people bring energy and life to a network of information about the past. And what an incredible amount of information has been generated! Many of our members actively collect books and articles on Laffite; guest speakers at the monthly meeting of The Laffite Society have shared many accounts about the Laffites and their contemporaries, some with a rich ancestry dating back to the actual time of Laffite; we have even had a few donations of original documents, articles, and books donated to the Society!

I foresee this input of data from all points in the network creating enough energy and interest in the Laffite era to bring back into focus a specific time in history so rich in lore to view a man’s life and activities without passing judgement; to therefore be able to comprehend a much larger picture of history. How did Laffite interact with others and with whom did he personally network? Obviously, with many people of every description, much the way it is today.