Maps Division, National Archives.


THE SKULL OF JEAN LAFFITE

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Historical confirmation of myth regarding the Laffites is difficult. Compounding that difficulty is the periodic appearance of outrageous tales which may appeal to the uninformed, but which are summarily dismissed by scholars.

One of the most far fetched stories to ever surface purportedly related to the brothers Laffite was reported in the Galveston Daily News in articles dated 1966, and 1970. According to these writings a human skull, marked with a treasure map and the inscription “1852 Capt. Gene Laffite” (sic) was traded to a local Galveston businessman by “an old Indian”.

In about February, 1966, Harley F. Strong operated a store, “The Time Shop”, located at 409 Moody (21st Street), in Galveston. According to Strong, an old, wrinkled, weathered “Indian” visited his store asking for money. In a stereotype considered politically incorrect in the 21st Century, and highly improbable in 1966, the old man spoke in broken English, saying, “Me want go to Beaumont”. Strong refused to help, but the old man reached into a carpet bag he carried and said,

“Me have skull Squaw had long time. No come back, you keep”. Mr. Strong gave the man some money, and the visitor left the skull, never to return.

The skull appeared to be marked with a felt pen, or other writing instrument and had an “X”, marking what Strong thought to be a Karankawa Indian burial ground, the possible site of alleged “treasure”. Although the skull was confirmed to be that of a human, relatively intact, it was missing the teeth and jawbone. Strong claimed that “doctors” had examined the skull and ascertained it could have been of the same time period of the Laffites. No other investigation was made. The source of the inscription is unknown.

Laffite scholars would not read these articles a second time. Even the most gullible layman would pose questions. To what did the date “1852” (or 1858 in one report) refer? Where had the skull been kept for the approximate century between 1852 and its appearance at “The Time Shop”? Obviously, no Karankawas had been on Galveston Island for over a century so who was the “old Indian”?

Mr. Strong, who lived at 1906 Avenue M, in Galveston, was reported to have been 65 years of age in 1966, would be expected to be deceased in 2008. The disposition of the skull following Strong’s death, and its current location is unknown.

Endnotes:
