In 1976, as part of the Bicentennial celebration of the United States, the Galveston Chamber of Commerce announced a project which would pay homage to Jean Laffite. This promotional effort included the minting of Laffite commemorative coins, the printing of a map of Galveston, and the casting of a Laffite statue.

No current member of the Chamber staff was with the organization in 1976, and, due to damage of the Chamber’s offices during hurricane Alicia, most of the original records relating to the project were destroyed.

Through interviews with local businessmen who were active in the Chamber of Commerce in 1976, the following information has been established.

Coins were minted showing a map of Galveston on one side and a representation of a stereotypical “pirate”, with sword held high, on the other. The coins were made of four different materials or finishes: bronze, pewter, sterling silver, and gold plated sterling silver. These coins were sold separately or as a set, packaged in a two-sided acrylic display and sequentially numbered. The number of coins minted and the number of sets offered is unknown.

An “old” map of Galveston was printed and sold for $1.00, and was the most financially successful item in the project. Having no copy of this map, identification is not possible. The number of maps sold, or originally printed, is unknown.

The bronze statues, approximately 18 inches in height, were executed by sculptor Juan Dell. There is no information at hand on how he came to be chosen as sculptor. Mr. Dell’s whereabouts is currently unknown. The number of bronzes actually cast is unknown, but has been estimated to have approximated fifteen or less. According to one businessman whose tenure with the Chamber encompassed the time period in question, there exists the possibility that none of the statues were actually sold, but were placed on loan to various business leaders in Galveston as a marketing technique. A list price of $1000 was placed on each statue.

There are currently two statues of which the writer is aware on public display in Galveston. One, marked “10-150” is on display in the offices of the Chamber of Commerce at the Moody Convention Center, and another, marked “18-150” is housed in the Galveston Texas History Center at the Rosenberg Library. The only other statue whose location has been confirmed at the time of this writing (February, 1995) is in the possession of Mr. Don Gartman, formerly of the Houston Lighting and Power Company, but recently residing in Argentina. One statue was reportedly in the possession of J.R. McConnell, a man whose exploits in Galveston during the 1970’s have been called the greatest real estate fraud in the history of the United States. McConnell committed suicide while in prison and the location of his statue is unknown.

The Chamber of Commerce is currently selling the remaining inventory of some bronze and pewter coins at an approximate cost of $5.00.
Yet to be answered are numerous questions concerning the Laffite project. Where is Juan Dell and the casting from which the statues were cast? Where were the coins minted and where are the dies? How many statues were cast, and where are they at this time?

Members interested in purchasing coins from the Chamber’s current inventory, please contact the Galveston Chamber of Commerce, 2106 Seawall Boulevard, Galveston, Texas, 77551 (409-763-5326).

13 March 1995

Champ d’Asile

French Filibusters on the Texas Frontier

Andrew W. Hall

With the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in June 1815, there came to an end one of the longest and most costly series of wars seen up to that time. France had been almost continually at war for more than 20 years. Napoleon was removed to exile at St. Helena, a remote British colony in the South Atlantic, and Louis XVIII reinstated the monarchy in France. Although the Bourbons were remarkably lenient toward most Frenchmen who had taken an active part in supporting first the revolution and, later, Napoleon’s attempts to create an empire, hundreds of French military officers chose to leave their homeland and continue their lives abroad. They remained loyal to Napoleon, and dreamed of the day when he would be restored to power.

Many of these exiles settled in Philadelphia. The city already had a large population of French emigrés. This number swelled in 1815-1816, and efforts began to secure federal land grants to enable them to settle permanently in the U.S. The Congress eventually made the Frenchmen a large grant of land in western Alabama, near the Tombigbee River. But the majority of Frenchmen were not particularly interested in beginning an agrarian settlement and, already short of cash, quickly sold off their land titles to speculators.

During this period, Charles Lallemand, a former general in Napoleon’s inner circle, de-

Charles Lallemand