Cronea and fourteen others volunteered and went aboard the schooner. Cronea remembered it was commanded by a man from Baltimore named Jones.

The schooner ran south, through the keys and into the Gulf of Mexico, “keeping out of the way of everything and flying American colors”, Cronea told Stuart.

The schooner arrived off Corpus Christi and put a total of forty men ashore with blankets and food, telling them they would be picked up.

The next day, Cronea said, a hermaphrodite brig (schooner-brigantine) hove to off the beach and sent a boat ashore.

The officer who came ashore told the forty men they were to sail the brig, which he said was a privateer. Everyone agreed to go, according to Cronea’s memoirs.

“The brig,” he told Stuart, “was under the command of a man we knew as Carroll, but whom I later learned was Captain James Campbell. He was Laffite’s right hand man.”

“The brig bristled with guns and was squared-rigged on the foremast, schooner (fore and aft) rigged on the mainmast and flew five jibs and topsails, and could outsail anything afloat. Seamen of the time said such ships were all winds and no feet”.

The ship, the Hotspur, flew the colors of the Republic of Cartagena (present-day Colombia), Cronea said, and raided Spanish shipping.

When the brig put into Mermentau, Louisiana, after the mutiny, late in 1820, and was burned, with Captain Campbell breaking up the crew, Cronea went ashore for good.

He told about all of these events in an interview in 1892 under shade trees in front of the U.S. Barge office in Galveston.

The reporter at the time said Cronea had sailed his butt-head schooner into Galveston with a load of watermelons from Bolivar Peninsula, and “his hair was white as human hair ever gets, and his black eyes sparkled, and his language was spiced with the choicest profanity.”

12 JUNE 1995

SOURCES ON JEAN LAFFITE AT THE ROSENBERG LIBRARY

ANNA B. PEEBLER

The Galveston and Texas History Center of the Rosenberg Library in Galveston welcomes all researchers interested in Jean Laffite and his times on the Island. The GTHC is one of the best known archives in the state and contains approximately 21,000 linear feet of manuscripts, 12,700 books, 1,500 maps, 30,000 photographs, and numerous newspapers and periodicals, brochures and architectural drawings. The GTHC archives concentrate on collecting local history for Galveston, city and county; however, it also has a good collection of books on general Texas history.

Members of the Laffite Society who have not used the facilities before may want to know that
the standard archival rules apply to all researchers. Those include: filling out an identification form for first time users, checking all belongings in provided lockers (the staff will supply paper and pencil, and a copy machine is available as well), using gloves with all fragile materials, and filling out request slips. The complete set of rules and regulations is readily available.

Individual indices for all the collections, including books, manuscripts, maps, and photographs are available to researchers wanting to work at their own pace. Individual questions are welcomed. Currently, the GTHC staff consists of four individuals: Casey Greene, Head of Special Collections, Shelly Henley, Assistant Archivist, Anna Peebler, Photo Archivist, and Julia Dunn, Archives clerk. Any member of the staff is able to help in most cases. However, Mr. Greene is probably the most familiar with the holdings because he has processed a large percentage of the collection during his tenure of ten years.

Overall, the GTHC offers sixteen books, twenty-six manuscript collections, five folders with various clippings, and a few illustrations regarding Jean Laffite, his men, and his camp in Galveston. All of these items are available to the public; however, all materials have to be used within the reading room, and some may be too fragile to be photocopied. According to Lise Darst, Museum Curator, there are no artifacts which could have belonged to Laffite in the Rosenberg Library. The Museum does possess a man’s toilettry set attributed to James Campbell, one of Laffite’s contemporaries, but its authenticity is questionable due to its much later Victorian style. Despite the popular myth that the Rosenberg Library’s attic is rich with incredible papers and artifacts, the truth is that both the Archives and the Museum Collection have been extensively inventoried and cataloged. There are no more surprises in the storage. This might have been true before the construction of the Moody Wing of the library when the lack of space did not permit complete inventory of its holdings.

Most of the items regarding Laffite are secondary sources, such as articles and copies of memoirs attributed to his contemporaries, rather than Laffite originals. Currently, the archives hold only one authentic Laffite item. It is MSS #26-0003 which is a small note handwritten and signed by Jean Laffite. Other items are facsimiles, but their authenticity is questionable. For example, MSS #26-O399, facsimile of a letter written by Laffite to President Madison, and MSS #47-0029, facsimile of several pages from the Laffite-Mortimer family Bible.

Probably the most interesting collection regarding Laffite is MSS #76-0007. This is an artificial collection consisting mainly of research done on Laffite by several individuals including Robert C. Vogel and John Howells. This collection also includes several articles on Laffite from the first three decades of the 20th Century, several revised copies of a Laffite bibliography done in the 1920s and 1930, and a copy of a Laffite journal donated to the library by John A. Laffite [Lafflin] in 1967. While the journal’s authenticity is questionable, the bibliography is very helpful in locating books and articles on Laffite from the 19th Century and early 20th Century. Some of these items may be available at the Rosenberg Library or may be obtained through the inter-library loan.

For researchers who live out of the Galveston area and cannot come to the GTHC in person, the staff can answer questions by mail. The GTHC receives up to forty letters a month, and most of them are answered within two weeks. In most cases, a letter should be addressed to Shelly Henley, Assistant Archivist, Rosenberg Library, 2310 Sealy, Galveston, Texas 77550. A research fee of $5.00 should be included with a letter to cover the costs of photocopying (for large numbers of copies the library will bill the researcher). For those who can visit the archives in person, the GTHC is located on the third floor of the Rosenberg Library and in open 9 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday.