THE LAFFITTE FAMILY OF BAYOU PIERRE

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The Laffitte family residing at Bayou Pierre, Louisiana, and the well known Laffites who were privateers and contraband traders in Louisiana and Texas, have been confused over the years by historians and by their own descendants as well. This has happened primarily because the given names in the two families were much the same, and because some of them were contemporaries. Separation of the two families will herein be attempted.

The progenitor of the Bayou Pierre Laffittes was Pierre Paul Bouet Laffitte, a native of the parish of Pouilleroque, Diocese of Lectoure, in Gascogne, France, and the son of Francois Bouet Laffitte and his wife Marianne. Familiarly called Paul or Bouet, he first appeared in the Natchitoches, Louisiana records on April 28, 1770. The occasion was his marriage to Marie Madeleine Grappe in St. Jean the Baptist Catholic Church. She was the daughter of Alexis Grappe and his wife Anne Guedon.

Alexis Grappe was an influential and wealthy citizen of Natchitoches. An Indian trader and interpreter, he was the second largest slave owner of the community in 1774. Grappe's father-in-law, Jacques Guedon (dit Muller), married to an Indian woman, had established Post du Bayou Pierre in 1723 with contraband trade with the Spanish as his motive. Post du Bayou Pierre, the town of Bayou Pierre, King Hill, Jordan Ferry, and modern Carmel are all one and the same. Log jams on the Red River made Bayou Pierre the main water route from Natchitoches to the north, affording access to the northwestern Indian tribes.

A militia roll of Natchitoches dated June 8, 1772, lists Paul Bouet Laffitte as 20 years old, five feet six inches in height, and enlisted for six months. He probably was a little older than twenty at that time. He was 42 years of age when the census of Natchitoches Parish was taken in 1787, and therefore he would have been 27 years old in 1772. He was somewhat older than Pierre and Jean Laffitte the privateers, who were born in 1779 and 1782 respectively. They were the sons of Marcus and Maria Nadrimal Laffitte. No relationship between the families has been found.

The children of Paul Bouet Laffitte and his first wife Marie Madeleine Grappe were:

1. Pierre Paul Bouet, born about 1772; married Ursule Gagne (Ganier) July 30, 1798. He was listed as a "Junior" in several records.
2. Jean Baptiste Francisco, born June 24, 1776.
3. Marie Teresa Jacinta Rosalia, born October 6, 1778; died 1782.
4. A male child who died January 3, 1781.

Madeleine Grappe Laffitte died January 12, 1781, probably from complications of childbirth.

Paul Bouet Laffitte continued his militia service and was on the Natchitoches Revolutionary War Roster as a rifleman as late as 1782. He was listed in a number of records as "Cadet" Bouet Laffitte, "cadet" meaning a minor military officer.

After the death of his first wife, Paul Bouet married Eulalie Marie Anne, the daughter of Manuel de Soto and Marie des Neiges de St. Denis.

Manuel de Soto, a Spaniard, was among the earliest settlers on Bayou Pierre. He probably obtained his land from the Indians and built his home there sometime between 1745 and 1750.

The children of Paul Bouet and Eulalie Marie Anne Laffitte were:

1. Marie Josepha, born December 15, 1783.
2. Marie des Neiges, born December 1, 1785.
3. Joseph Marie Cezaire, born August 9, 1787; married Mary Elizabeth Latham or Litton in 1817.
5. Louis Bouet, born November 30, 1794; married Marie Antonio Flores in 1816.
6. Manuel, born June 1796; died November 21, 1796 at the age of 5 months.
7. Marie Felicite Bouet, born September 16, 1797; married Cezaire Fonteneau.

The Natchitoches Parish census of 1787 enumerated Paul Bouet Laffitte, his wife, and four others.
children (Pierre, Baptiste, Marie and Des Neiges) as living in Bayou aux Pierre north of Natchitoches. He had 84 arpents (about 84 acres) of land, two slaves, 350 cows and 40 horses. There were only nine heads of family on the creek. It is not certain when he moved there or how he obtained his land, but both of his fathers-in-law had connections to Bayou Pierre.

Bayou Pierre was called Las Piedras Creek (Stony Creek) by the Spanish, and was not named in honor of the youthful Pierre Laffitte. Actually a western channel of the Red River, Bayou Pierre diverges from the upper Red within the city limits of Shreveport. The bayou flows in a southwesterly direction, paralleling the main channel more or less for one hundred miles, then re-enters the Red River just above Grand Encore.

Paul Bouet applied for and obtained land for his sons, Pierre and Baptiste, on June 12, 1784 from Don Antonio Gil y Barbo, Captain of the Militia, Commandant and Governor at Presidio Nuestra Senora del Pilar de Nacogdoches. Paul Bouet for some unknown reason represented himself as the uncle of the boys, who were only 12 and 8 at the time. The land was granted from Bayou Naticole to the south shore of Bayou Pierre Lake, with no stipulation as to the amount of acreage.

After the Louisiana Purchase, the grant was surveyed on September 6, 1823 by John Dinsmore, Deputy Surveyor of the United States, and it contained 11,393.89 acres of land. This probably included the 84 arpents or home place Paul Bouet had acquired originally.

The Louisiana Congress decided by 1834 that the title to the 11,000 acres granted by the Spanish to the Laffitens was so vague that Pierre was only entitled to 2,000 acres, the quantity allowed by the act of March 3, 1807, to those settled by the Spanish Government. Pierre's brother Baptiste was mentally incompetent and Pierre acquired the land.

Pierre Jr. lived into the 1840's and was an important member of the community. His known children were:

1. Marie Magdelein Bouet, born November 17, 1799; married Pedro Flores.
2. Clement Bouet, born December 7, 1801; married Marie Catarina Cardova on October 20, 1845.
4. Sever, born in 1808; baptized December 6, 1812; married first to Elizabeth Lee on May 15, 1835, and secondly to Terese F. Vasco.
5. Lesure, married Sallie Le Garse.

Pierre Laffit, the privateer, was born October 21, 1779 at Port au Prince, Santo Domingue (Haiti). He married Francoise Selille (Sel), the daughter of Jean Baptiste I'ang Selille, a planter of Santo Domingue. Selille (Sel) became famous in New Orleans as a portrait and miniature painter.

The children of Pierre and Francoise Laffit included three daughters not named, as well as:

2. Eugene Stephen Louis, born about 1802.
3. Cezar Edouard.

The Journal of Jean Laffite by John A. Laffite says that Pierre, the privateer, was granted 11,400 acres of land along the Sabine River near Natchitoches by the bureau of Louisiana Land Grants. This is a mistake, as the reference is to the grant made to Pierre Laffite, the son of Paul Bouet Laffitte. Pierre Laffite, the privateer, had no land grant unless it was given in another name.

Paul Bouet Laffitte was an intelligent and educated man, as reflected in his correspondence. He was also a loyal Spanish subject, only incurring the government's disfavor in 1799 when he was arrested and jailed in Nacogdoches for slipping an iron file to the seven Spaniards incarcerated there. The seven were men who had been captured while with the Philip Nolan expedition. Laffitte was released promptly when the Caddo, Nadaco and Caudacho Indians threatened to attack the garrison if he was kept prisoner.

In December of 1814 Paul Bouet, his children and other relatives arrived at La Bahia in Texas from Bayou Pierre. They were seeking asylum with the Spanish in order to escape the military draft in Louisiana occasioned by the war with England, taking advantage of the pardon offered to clear their names of complicity during the Mexican Revolution. The family, after gaining their objectives, returned to their homes on Bayou Pierre. Paul Laffitte's loyalties were again demonstrated to be with the Spanish rather than the French or Americans.

Paul Bouet or his son Pierre sent a letter to...
Mariano Varela, Governor of Texas, November 28, 1815 advising him that insurgent troops had sailed from Louisiana for Galveston Bay in a squadron rumored to belong to "the pirate Laffite". The Bayou Pierre Laffites were certainly aware of the corsair Laffites and willing to inform on them; therefore, they probably weren't even distant relatives.

Paul Bouet Laffitte's sons and grandsons left many descendants in Louisiana and Texas, perpetuating the name "Laffitte" in its various forms.

Notes
1. Elizabeth Shown Mills, Natchitoches Extracts of the Catholic Church Registers of the French and Spanish Post of St. Jean des Natchitoches in Louisiana 1729-1803 (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1977), p. 125. The patronymic "Laffitte" has also been spelled Laffite, Lafitte, La Fite, etc., but most often with two "r's" and two "t's.
5. The Laffite family bible, Sam Houston Regional Library, Liberty, Texas.
8. Ibid. pp. 155, 206.
15. Ibid. pp. 222, 345.
17. Ibid. pp. 188, 237.
23. Ibid. p. 228; Mills, Natchitoches Marriages, p. 30.
30. Ibid. p. 384; Mills, Natchitoches Marriages, p. 146.
31. Ibid. p. 29.
32. Ibid. p. 68; Mills, Natchitoches Marriages, p. 75.
33. Shirley Ritchie Ochsner, "Pierre LaFitte Family Genealogy", manuscript in the Sam Houston Regional Library, Liberty, Texas. This family claims descent from Pierre Laffite the privateer, but it is obvious that their ancestor was Pierre the son of Paul Bouet Laffitte. The family information was obtained from a relative, Mary Alice Laffite, who was evidently not French-speaking and who was relating family tradition.
34. Ibid. p. 2.
35. T.H. McKinnie and B.W. Porter vs. C.E. Jenkins, Suit #9690, District Court, DeSoto Parish, Louisiana.
41. Maurine T. Wilson and Jack Jackson, Philip Nolan and Texas (Waco: Texian Press, 1987),
p. 75; Arrest of Pablo Bouet Laffite, Nacogdoches, 5-1-1801. Bexar Archives.
42. Document 107, 12-30-1814, Bexar Archives. Transcription, translation and footnotes by Jeff Modzelewski, member of The Laffite Society, P.O. Box 1325, Galveston, Texas.