WHO WAS JEAN LAFFITE?
Jean L. Epperson

Who as Jean Laffite the French pirate/privateer who sailed the Gulf of Mexico during 1809 through 1821? It is interesting that at least three different families have traditions that he was their ancestor using the alias of Jean Laffite.

Carolyn Boutte Peterson, the current secretary of the Laffite Society of Galveston Texas, reviews her family's legend of Francois Zenon Boutte (1785-1826) also known as Jean Laffite, as told in family records and various articles of the New Orleans Genesis, Southwestern Genealogical Society, and other sources.

In the records of the Supreme Court of Louisiana the Island of Barataria was granted by the French Crown to Villars Dubreuil prior to 1759. Barataria Island is encircled by bayous, Villars, Barataria, Rigoletts, Perot and Lake Salvador. At the time of the Louisiana purchase in 1803 the land was owned by Sieur Pierre Lavigne. The Boutte brothers Hilaire and Jean-Baptiste bought the Island of Barataria in 1805 from Pierre Lavigne.

Zenon the son of Antoine Boutte and Hyacinthe Decuir was a nephew to Hilaire and Jean Baptiste. Known to be a mariner and smuggler as a young man Zenon became the legendary Jean Laffite in family memoirs. Laffite's corsair headquarters were on the island of Grand Terre on the coast during 1811 to 1814.

Zenon acquired Hilaire's southern half of the Island of Barataria in 1819 and a son of Jean-Baptiste Boutte acquired the northern portion of the Island. The land was sold many times but descendants of the original landowners and others are still receiving royalty checks from the rich petroleum discoveries in the area.

Carolyn Peterson finds the family legend interesting, that Jean Laffite was said to be her ancestor Francois Zenon Boutte, but puts little faith in its authenticity.

The next family to claim an ancestor to have been the famous Jean Laffite is Anthony John Billot of A.J. Billot Ministries in Houston, Texas, when he spoke to the Laffite Society in Galveston May 13, 1996. Billot stated that Jean Pierre Billot (1749-1826) was really Jean Laffite the famous pirate/privateer. Billot produced a pedigree chart showing the decent of Jean Pierre to him. Billot's documentation and sources says Jean Pierre Billot acquired a land grant #371 in 1787 on Bayou Darborne, in the Lafourche Interior. He purchased a sailing ship which he named "The Laforte" in memory of his late wife Marie Laforte. He gives no information connecting Jean Pierre Billot to Jean Laffite. He lists pension applications by widows of Jacques and Charles and Etienne Billots as private couriers of the Louisiana Militia commanded by Captains. Laffite and Gambi. His information is very disconnected and he does not explain the relationship between Jean Pierre, Jacques, Charles and Etienne Billot.

Anthony John Billot's historical data given to the Laffite Society was very rambling and incomplete.

The last family to claim an ancestor to have been Jean Laffite are the Hix brothers Charles and Cody, residents of Baytown, Texas. They were on a quest to establish that their ancestor, Jean Baptist Autheman born in 1782 used the alias Jean Laffite. Stories passed down in their family for nearly two centuries claimed he was.
Jean Baptist’s father was Jean Nicholas Autheman from Martigues, France. He was a ship captain and had traveled back and forth from France to New Orleans but died in France. Jean Nicholas had 12 children and it is believed he set up some of his sons in the privateering business in New Orleans. Lots of speculation but little fact.

Newspaper accounts stated that the brothers Hix hoped to produce a film establishing the true identity of Jean Laffite. Finding facts hard to come by they are now concentrating on finding the so called Jean Laffite ship, “The Pride”, in Lake Miller, Chambers County. There are some very old ships sunk in the mud there. It will be an interesting project, Good luck.

Who was Jean Laffite? Pierre and Jean Laffite signed a disposition with the French Consul in New Orleans in 1813 stating they were born in Bordeaux, France. Pierre said he was 35 years old and the owner of the brig La Diligence and Jean was 32 years of age and the Captain of the ship. J. B. Laporte was interim French consul in New Orleans as of February 1813.

Likely parents of Pierre and Jean were Antoine Laffite and his wife Guillemette Chataigne of Bordeaux whose children were Pierre born 4-12 1772, Alexandre born 5-6-1776, Marie born 5-6-1776 twins, Marie Therese born 12-24-1779- Jean born 7-6-1781 and Jean born 8-15-1782. The first Jean born apparently died and the next child was given his name also. The children were baptized in the church of Saint Seurin. Source, “Genealogie et Historie de la Caraibe numero 82: Mai 1992, archives of the Laffite Society, Galveston, TX.

Jean Laffite was an engrossing character and engendered lots of speculation. Why folks would like to have a pirate in their family tree though is another mystery.