Charles Nathan Tilton
Privateer with Jean Laffite
Dr. Reginald Wilson

Early in the month of January 1821, the United States brig-of-war Enterprise, under the command of Lieutenant Kemy, anchored off Campeachy, Jean Laffite's commune on Galveston Island. Lieutenant Kemy came ashore and informed Laffite that he must abandon his establishment, destroy his buildings, and leave the island.

This Laffite agreed to do, but he requested sixty days for his men, some with families, to disband in an orderly fashion. Lieutenant Kemy agreed to this proposal.

Some of the men returned to New Orleans, some to various islands in the Caribbean, some to the Sabine River area, while others remained in the immediate area of Galveston Bay and quietly integrated with the ranchers and farmers. One of these last was Charles Nathan Tilton.

Charles Nathan Tilton was born in New Hampton, New Hampshire, on December 11, 1799, to Green and Judith Favor Tilton, who had eleven other children. He decided to seek his fortune in the early 1800's by going to sea, something commonly done in those times. Just how he ended up aboard a ship commandeered by pirate Jean Laffite is not clear, although some believe that he was captured at sea by Laffite's men and was assigned as a cabin boy to one of many ships in the fleet headed by the buccaneer.

When the pirate ships came to Galveston to establish their headquarters, young Tilton was with them and had moved up to the rank of bosun's mate. Nothing is known, however, about his voyages or time spent as a privateer. As with most of those who shipped under a letter of marque, silence was the best way to handle this delicate situation.

It was during this time in Galveston that Charles Tilton became a close friend to Charles Cronca, and he remained so the rest of their lives.

Not until 1820 did Charles's family learn that he was alive and well. They feared that he had been lost at sea.

After Laffite sailed out of Galveston in 1821, Tilton's whereabouts were not known for some eight or nine years. He may have shipped out, or lived in Chambers County, or he may have gone immediately to Matagorda Peninsula where records show that he bought one hundred two acres of land in 1829. He called his place "Tiltona".

When he married in 1831, he took his bride to Tiltona, where he had his house and farm and raised cattle.

Salt water was still in his blood, so in 1840 he purchased a ninety-ton schooner named Blackjack. His cargo is unknown, but in those times the transporting of slaves along the coast was widespread.

In 1847 he sold his Matagorda land, house, and four hundred head of cattle to Samuel Maverick, one of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence. Maverick left a slave on the property to brand the newborn calves and keep fences in repair - an assignment the slave failed to carry out. As a result, Maverick's cattle began to roam all over the peninsula and the locals began to call these "Mavericks". This terminology gradually spread across Texas and to this day all lost, unbranded cattle are called "Mavericks".

Tilton, with his wife and children, moved to Cove, Chambers County, Texas, where he had acquired property ten years earlier from the Mexican government. Here Charles continued to maintain a low profile and live quietly with the families in that area. During the Battle of San Jacinto he is listed under the command of Major McNutt at Harrisburg, guarding the baggage of General Sam Houston's army.

In Galveston in the 1850's, Tilton started a freight-hauling business, using heavy
wagons and horses to haul freight from ships in the harbor.

It has passed down through the family that on a number of occasions Charles would leave for a week to visit Charlie Crona at High Island, and upon his return he would be "flushed" with money!

Charles Nathan Tilton died in Galveston on December 24, 1860. He is buried in the Tilton Cemetery on the banks of Old River at Cove, Texas.

After Tilton's death, Charles Crona and his daughter, Annie, came to visit Mrs. Tilton. The trip by schooner took two days. Unfortunately, they missed the Tilton boat landing by a half mile, so that it was necessary to slog through heavy marsh to get to high ground.

Bibliography