Editor's note: The Laffite Society is grateful to Mr. Bertrand Guillot de Suduiraut for his permission to print the following article. It was originally published in the bulletin Généalogie et Histoire de la Caraïbe ("Genealogy and History of the Caribbean"), No. 82, pp. 1618 - 1620, May 1996.

Preceding issues of Généalogie et Histoire de la Caraïbe have opened new avenues of interest as a result of further research carried out in Bordeaux. We can now attempt to put to the test a point concerning presumed origins of our pirates. We shall not return to their buccaneering activities, but will only make reference to them at the end in trying to clear the tangled path of their roots.

Upon verification, many of the different places of origin now and then cited - Saint-Jean d'Angely, Digne, Nice, Bilbao, Dijon, Dax - appear without foundation. The registers of the former civil state in these towns remain mute on the individuals connected to the family that occupies our attention. Only three possible trails remain open to us. The first is the Bordeaux; the second, the Basque; and the third, the Santo-Domingan.

The Bordeaux Trail

This trail is confirmed by the baptismal registers of the church of Saint Scurin, where we have been able to pick up the births of six children of Antoine Laffite, rope maker, and of Guillemette Chataigne, his wife.

A. 12 April 1772 - Pierre Laffite: p., Pierre Fendelé; m., Jeanne Sudre (see I, below)
B. 6 May 1774 - Alexandre Laffite: p., Alexandre Laffite; m., Marie-Anne Sudre (see II, below)
C. 6 May 1774 - Marie Laffite, twin sister of the preceding
D. 24 December 1779 - Marie-Thérèse Laffite: p., Pierre Laffite; m., Marie-Ursule Laffite
E. 6 July 1781 - Jean Laffite: p., Jean Vivé; m., Marie-Gabrielle Faure
F. 15 August 1782 - Jean Laffite: p., Pierre Mathieu; m., Marie Morin (see III, below)

I. Pierre Laffite

Son of Antoine Laffite and of Guillemette Chataigne, born in Bordeaux in 1772, he is officially identified by his marriage in St.-Jean-de-Luz on December 29, 1793, with Sabine d'Amespi. The baptismal record is certified on his marriage writ. The descendants of their last daughter, Marie-Anne (born St.-Jean-de-Luz 5 June 1797, married Martin Goyetché), continue to this date. It is noted that the father is said to have been in Bayonne during this baptism.

According to the manuscript of Léonce Goyetché, Pierre disappeared, abandoning wife and children. If this is, indeed, the same person, we see him reappearing in April 1804 in New Orleans in the company of his cadet brother, Jean, on board two pirate ships (cf. Archives of the Federal Court of Louisiana). The adventures of their careers are repeated in all the historical novels.

Pierre never returned to France, perhaps because there was a risk of being charged with bigamy. A Pierre Laffite was known (but is he the same?) to have married Françoise Séi L'Etang in Louisiana about 1810. She gave him many children, one of them a son named Charles Laffite with descendants in the family Esnoul de Livaudais.

According to Georges Blond in his History of the Buccaneer and the American writer Stanley C. Arthur in Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover, Pierre Laffite would have died in Crevecoeur, Missouri, in 1837, at age sixty-five years, which corresponds exactly to his date of birth in Bordeaux.

A year later in 1838, the manuscript previously cited in an earlier issue of Généalogie et Histoire de la Caraïbe reported that an American lawyer presented himself in France at the home of the descendants of Pierre Laffite, the Goyetché family, with the intention of obtaining from them the authority to recover his fortune, impounded in American banks. The lawyer was refused.

II. Alexandre Laffite

Curiously, one finds this same given name with reference to buccaneering in a brother of Pierre and Jean Laffite, better known as Alexandre Frédéric or Dominique You, and sometimes under the sobriquet 'Captain You'. This Alexandre also followed the same career as Pierre and Jean and...
III. Jean Laffite

His identity is confirmed by his baptismal record of 1782 - the first Jean having, without doubt, died at an early age. It was a custom of the times to give the same name to the next boy child born.

Jean would have been twenty-two years of age at the time of his arrival with his older brother Pierre in New Orleans in 1804. This date of birth (15 August 1782) corresponds well to the one indicated by Jean Laffite in the Journal of Jean Laffite. The Journal was written about 1845-1850 and miraculously rediscovered and published in 1958 under Stanley C. Arthur's name with the admission that there was a question about the authenticity of the text (which controversy continues to this day).

Even if the cited date of birth is indeed the same, Jean Laffite nevertheless declared in the Journal that he was born in Santo Domingo and not at Bordeaux, the son of Marcus Laffite and of Marie Zora Nadrimal (we will find this reference mentioned again below on our Santo-Domingan "trail").

What is one to think about the change in location for place of birth? Could this have been for the purpose of concealing his origins and his past life as a buccaneer?

In about 1805-1810, when he was engaged in a lumber business and particularly in the shipping of ebony in New Orleans, Jean stated that he was born in Bordeaux, which he left at a young age with his parents for Santo Domingo. He tells of then being married, becoming a widower, and of launching himself into the activities with which we associate him.

If one matches the time of birth (15 August 1782) in the Journal previously cited, he would have been forty-eight years old when he met in 1830 Emma Mortimore, whom he married in 1832 under the name of John Lafflin. This holds true for his date of death in 1854 at the age of 72 years - he would have been born in 1782 (cf. Georges Blond and other sources, including the Généalogie et Histoire de la Caraïbe reference concerning Stanley C. Arthur and his book Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover).

Is the Bordeaux trail the right one? The convergences are multiple without being otherwise certain.

The Goyetche manuscript written by the historian Léonce Goyetche, member of the historic Academy of Paris and grandson of Pierre Laffite, cannot be considered spurious. However, in this unpublished testimony certain dates do not correspond.

Léonce Goyetche writes that, after having temporarily quit the army, Pierre Laffite re-enlisted and participated in the Napoleonic campaigns with the grade of Captain. Goyetche further states it was not until 1810 that Pierre abandoned his family for Louisiana. The official archives of Louisiana state that a Pierre Laffite found himself in New Orleans in 1804. In response to the question, is this the same Pierre Laffite?, it is not possible that one man could have been in Louisiana and also in the services of the Grand Army of Napoleon at the same time.

Relating these events more than sixty years after, one can suppose that Léonce Goyetche might have committed an error in the dates. That Pierre Laffite abandoned his family is, indeed, apparent. Despite the hiatus, one might say that the agreement of the dates of birth in Bordeaux might present a possible lead to the beginning of a solution. Nevertheless, proof is missing.

The Basque Trail

Let's recall briefly ² that we find three brothers, all natives of Biarritz, sons of Laurent Laffite (1753-1795) and of Marie Daguerre (born in Bidart, 1747). The latter died in 1809 in Bordeaux, where she came to establish herself in 1793 with her last son, ten years of age at that time. These three children are:

Pierre - born 2 November 1773, died in Santa Lucia 4 December 1838 (see I, below)
Louis - born 24 October 1779, died at Bordeaux 13 January 1851 (see II, below)
Jean, the cadet - born 6 October 1783 (see III, below)

I. Pierre Laffite

After a career as a well known naval officer, Pierre leaves France for the Antilles after 1795. The presence of a Pierre-Laurent Laffite (without doubt, the same?) is noted in 1810 on the island of Santa Lucia at the head of a coffee-house, and in Castries where he is mentioned as a notary and member of a Masonic lodge. His passage to Philadelphia in 1822 is noted. He dies in Santa Lucia in 1838.

From his marriage with Anne-Rose Kéleric Delord will come eight children, born in 1807, 1810, 1813, 1815, 1817, 1820, 1824, and 1828. These descendants are known from correspondence which he addressed to his cadet brother Louis in Bordeaux. Although the places of birth were not mentioned, they are probably Castries at Santa Lucia.
Nevertheless, it is difficult to see this person on his plantation in Santa Lucia while carrying on his buccaneer activities in Barataria and New Orleans at the same time and in the same years. Unless - a hypothesis - Santa Lucia only served him as a secondary base for his pirating activities, and he conceived his children between two ports of call.

II. Louis Laffite

Installed as a businessman and shipping broker in Bordeaux where he resided at Pier 2, Chartrons, Louis Laffite married Jenny Bradshaw there in 1807. They had seven children. From the marriage of their oldest daughter, Anna - Maria, in 1810 to Jean Frédéric Klipsch, came descendants of numerous business families who are present today in Bordeaux 4.

Louis Laffite died in Bordeaux on 13 January 1881. His second son, Jean-Laurent, born in 1812, married Emma Siklé in Philadelphia in 1835. It is not known to this day why, in the relationship between Pierre and Louis - for example, in their correspondence referred to above, and also in Pierre's correspondence in which he gives a brief summary of his positions of service - Louis did not make mention of his cadet brother, Jean. Those papers we have on hand are conserved by a branch of Bordeaux descendants of Louis Laffite, the Rogier family.

III. Jean Laffite

Except for his record of birth in Biarritz in 1783, this third son remains unknown. It is certain only that he followed his mother to Bordeaux and that eventually there was no trace of him. Could our principal hero have left to join his older brother? If this is the case, he has succeeded in confusing all the trails.

This Basque trail - does it present another credible solution? How is it that for the Bordeaux trail, the birth dates correspond closely to those of our individuals? But this is not sufficient evidence.

The respective careers of Pierre and Louis seem to be, for the former, a colonist on the islands, and for the latter, a well-established businessman from Bordeaux. As for the third, we arrive at nothing!

We may add that Grace King, in her book *New Orleans, the Land and its People*, written in 1895, speaks (but without citing a reference to the civil record) of Pierre and Jean Laffite's births at Bayonne, near Biarritz.

One can again read in *The Life and Times of Jean Laffite*, Vol. XII, Spring, 1992, from an author using the pen name of Dr. J.O. Dyer, that Jean Laffite was born of a noble family in France in 1783 in the province of Hautes-Pyrénées. His father and his mother were guillotined during the Revolution. When Jean was 17 years old, he emigrated with Pierre to Martinique where during a year or more he lived on a sugar plantation. Jean and Pierre then emigrated to New Orleans in 1803 where they became contrabandists...

The Santo-Domingan Trail

Since the discovery and the publication by Stanley C. Arthur of the *Journal of Jean Laffite*, this source has become the one repeated by the majority of authors treating the subject, Georges Blond among others. Do we have to believe in its authenticity? Opinions are divided. Even within the American association "The Laffite Study Group," some are for, and defend the authenticity of, the manuscript. Others only see in this document a skillfully assembled historical montage of facts and the apocryphal. Where is the truth? It is difficult to see with clarity.

What of the parish register of Santo Domingo, from which was issued a genealogical table on four sheets which we have before us? Drawn up in 1976 by Robert Alderdice (?), it reads as follows:

Marcus Laffite (1763-1817), married Marie Zora Nadrima (died Port-au-Prince 1783), daughter of Abhorad Nadrima and of Zora (1730-1804). Eight children were born of this marriage, as follows:

1. N. Laffite, born Port-au-Prince 1767, died Charleston 1845
2. Anna Laffite, born Port-au-Prince 1769, died Port-au-Prince 1811
3. Alexandre F. Laffite, born Port-au-Prince 1771, died New Orleans circa 1830
4. Marcus Laffite, born Port-au-Prince 1773, died Port-au-Prince 1811
5. Henri Laffite, born Port-au-Prince 1775, died Cartagena 1840
6. Yvonne Laffite, born Port-au-Prince 1777, died Philadelphia 1850
7. Pierre Antoine Laffite, born Port-au-Prince 1779, died Crevecoeur, Missouri, 1844
8. Jean Laffite, both Port-au-Prince 1782, died Alton, Illinois, 1854

One can remark that the third, Alexandre F., could be Captain You, cited in all the writings as an older brother of Pierre and Jean, our
principle individuals who figure in seventh and eighth positions above.

This American genealogy is more complete, with the descendants of Jean Laffite and with his first wife, Christina Lewein, or Levine, native of Sainte-Croix, daughter of Michael Lewein and of his second wife, Rachel Faucette, who would have had from another marriage with James Hamilton a son with the given name of Alexander.4

This same record gives next the second marriage of Jean Laffite in 1832 with Emma Mortimore. One finds still in this same table the descendants of the captain, Beluche, referred to in the novels, as a relative of the Laffite brothers. We see also that Beluche descended from a Bellochis/Sandoval family, in which the members would have been baptized in St.-Jean-de-Luz, where I, being in that place, was able to confirm that there exists no such trace in the local archives.

All of this would be perfect and the problem resolved if the archives of Port-au-Prince revealed to us all these births. The research carried out by Monsieur Pierre Bardin on the parish records prior to that of ours testifies to the absence of all of our buccaneers for the cited dates.5

Unless Jean Laffite has disguised the truth, he was not born in any parish in Santo Domingo.

Temporary Conclusion

Except in the event of new and uncontestable discoveries, one must admit that Laffite Brothers & Co., Buccaneers, have done all they can to conceal their origins. If the Bordeaux trail presents some clues that would demand a research pursuit, the Basque trail, except for the same given names and approximate dates of birth, does not offer sufficiently conclusive proof. But does one ever know?

The Santo-Domingan Trail remains. On paper it appears without contest. It follows and confirms the "famous rediscovered journal" of Jean Laffite. Point by point, everything lines up exactly, lacking proof only! When our friends in Louisiana have provided the origins of this reconstruction, precise dates, authentic copies of records and the address of the archives where we can see them, we will then be able to lock up this dossier.

In our opinion, none of these three trails provides us to date with a definitive genealogical answer. This inquiry will, perhaps, continue in subsequent issues.

Questions
Island of Santa Lucia (Sainte-Lucie)

One of the daughters of Pierre Laffite (from the Basque "trail"), Nelly, born 1 January 1815, would have married, on 16 August 1838, N. Piet, a notary. Do the registers in Santa Lucia exist for that period?

Martinique

As far the career of Pierre Laffite (from the Bordeaux "trail"), alleged captain in the Napoleonic armies, would it be possible to find in those archives indications of his time of military service?

Embarkation for the Islands

An analysis of the embarkation registries of Bayonne, Bordeaux, Nantes, La Rochelle, and other ports cities, might give some indication of the ship passages made by the Laffites.

Notes
1. Généalogie et Histoire de la Caraïbe, No. 63, September, 1994, p. 1152; original manuscript of the historian Léonce Goyetche (1822-1885), grandson of Marie Anne Laffite and of Martin Goyetche (1792-1878).