Smugglers Siphoned Merchants' Trade

News of Laffite's impact on commercial trade may be found in contemporary newspapers throughout the Mississippi Valley.

"The smuggling at Barataria has greatly injured all honest traders," writes an anonymous correspondent from New Orleans in the Missouri Gazette & Illinois Advertiser (Sat. June 11, 1814).

"In consequence of his (Laffite's) piracy and smuggling, a great variety of goods are very cheap here."

The Baratarians profited greatly from the effects of the Embargo and the prohibition of the slave trade. Vincent Nolte complained that the Baratarians had siphoned off much of Louisiana's hard currency. Slaves sold for $150-$200 at Barataria fetched $600-$700 in New Orleans.

(Memoirs, p. 189)

Beluche Biography Reviewed

By Pam Keyes


To write a good biography, an author must understand the environment and era which influenced the person studied. For her biography of Renato Beluche, Dr. Jane Lucas De Grummond more than accomplished her homework in that respect. During 35 years of active research, she traveled from Baton Rouge to Venezuela, Panama, Columbia, Trinidad, Jamaica and Haiti, piecing together crumbling newspaper accounts and government documents relating to Beluche, the New Orleans native who became a general under the great South American leader, Simon Bolivar.

In the first third of the book, the background and careers of Beluche and Jean and Pierre Laffite are paralleled in an interesting manner. All three played an important part in the Battle of New Orleans at Chalmette; all three knew how to turn privateering ventures into highly profitable deals, although Beluche was by far the best corsair. When the Laffites were at Barataria, Beluche often brought his captured prizes there.

Although the Laffites sank to obscurity following Galveston, Beluche found success sailing in the ranks of Bolivar's marine forces. The book deals well with tales of such conflicts as the Battle of Lake Maracaibo and the siege of Puerto Cabello.

One of the most absorbing accounts is a nearly complete transcript of Beluche's trial for piracy at Kingston, Jamaica. His supposed "piracy" was the theft of a small boat. The jury, however, apparently considered the evidence insufficient as he was found not guilty.

Exacting details from the reports of land sales and ship disbursements add to the color found in the book. A definitive biography of Beluche, the book offers much more: asides of Bolivar and his associates, and glimpses of the commercial aspects of privateering in the early 1800s on the Caribbean.

Above all else, the book succeeds the most in showing how the atmosphere of the time affected one man, privateer Renato Beluche.