A VISIT TO GALVESTON IN 1818 /J. Randall Jones

After the Battle of New Orleans, La., Lafitte, who had taken an active part with the Americans, located on Galveston Island and my friends heard that he had a number of African Negroes to sell. A drove had been purchased of him at one dollar per pound and smuggled into Louisiana.

My friends wished me to let them [know] if any such speculations could be made and offered to divide profits with me for my assistance.

The last year several traders had come out and a good many American families had settled between Sabine and Nacogdoches. Also many Mexican traders were passing from San Antonio with horses and mules. I disposed of my stock and proposed to visit Galveston. I took two men with me on whom I could depend. I proceeded to Turtle Bayou near the mouth of the Trinity, where I found a man and wife settled. There I arranged to leave our horses and proceed in a large pirogue [canoe] along the coast to Galveston.

While preparing for the trip we saw several boats approaching - A small sloop and several yaws loaded with men, we could not conjecture where they were going, [and] on their landing I recognised an old acquaintance who commanded and owned the sloop. He informed us that it was General Lallemand, a Frenchman in command of about 100 men of all nations who was going to establish near the mouth of the Trinity on some revolutionary scheme.

The sloop was to return to Galveston. I and my companions took passage in her and took the pirogue in tow to insure a return passage. On arriving at Galveston I was introduced by my friend, the captain of the sloop, to the great Lafitte. He treated me with the most respectful attention, while I staid which was two days and two nights. I think there was 100 or 200 men there of all nations and some few women. There was a number of boats of different sizes. There was a large schooner which I was informed was a prize laden with sugar, coco, coffee and wines, and there was an armed schooner. Lafitte himself had a pretty good house, the balance were made hastily of planks, sails, etc. Lafitte had thrown up an earthen fort and had some cannon mounted on the Bay. There was a schooner from Boston there trading potatoes and etc. for groceries.

I informed Lafitte of my business. He informed me that he was out of Negroes at that time but he expected some before long.

Lafitte was a man about six feet in height, proportionately made, tolerable fair skin - his hair dark, a little gray mixed and was a very handsome man. I was well treated by himself and all his people.

We left Galveston in our small boat - crossed to Bolivar Point and came around the coast on the east side of the bay - landed safely at the mouth of Turtle Bayou. We prepared to return to Nacogdoches.

Some miles above and on the banks of the Trinity we came to the encampment of General Lallomand [Champ d'Asile], they were busily engaged in throwing up a place of defence of dirt and timber, everything was carried on in a military style. Sentinels on post day and night. The General treated me with marked attention. We stayed all night and left next morning; the General remained here a short time and then broke up and dispersed.

The storm was from the eastward. It occurred about the middle of September 1818. I was afterwards informed by a person who was at that time on Galveston Island, that it was all covered by water except about one acre where Lafitte's fort was on the Bay.

(From a MS by J. Randall Jones, originally in the possession of the Library of the Galveston Historical Society and copied by Philip C. Tucker. The original was destroyed in the 1900 hurricane.)