The original manuscript memoir and family papers of Jean Laffite are preserved in the private collection of William D. Simpson, of Houston, Texas. Mr. Simpson, proprietor of the William Simpson Galleries, Inc., acquired the Laffite Papers from descendant John A. Laffite in 1969.

This unique manuscript collection consists of two large, leather-bound journal memoirs written by Jean Laffite between 1845 and 1850, two French bibles filled with genealogical entries pertaining to several generations of Laffites, and a number of small "journals," notebooks and ledgers. Also included in the Laffite Papers are several daguerreotypes of Jean Laffite and his family, photographs of documents no longer in the collection, and the Stanley Clisby Arthur Portfolio (photostats of other important documents related to Laffite).

Mr. Arthur's biography of Laffite, Jean Laffite, Gentleman Rover (New Orleans: Harmanson, 1952), is based partly on information and some documents received from John A. Laffite. (Arthur did not have the Laffite memoir in his possession while writing the Gentleman Rover book. Madeleine Fabiola Kent, author of the "biographical novel" The Corsair (Garden City, Doubleday and Co., 1952), did have access to a Laffite memoir journal owned by Mr. Laffite). One of the large journal books has been
translated into English, and was published by Mr. Laffite under the Title, *The Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story* (New York: Vantage Press, 1958).

John Andrechyne Laffite inherited the Laffite papers (hereafter referred to as the Journals of Jean Laffite) from his grandfather, Jules Jean Laffite, in 1924, but did not make the papers known to historians until more than twenty years later. By his own account, Mr. Laffite, who could not read French, never knew what his great-grandfather's journals contained until he showed them to historial Arthur in New Orleans. Having authenticated his claim to being the great grandson of the famous privateer-patriot, Laffite traveled extensively and consequently became extremely well versed in Laffite history and folklore; he tracked down Laffite documents in New Orleans, Galveston, Austin, Washington, and other U.S. cities, and claimed to have carried on the search as far away as Havana, Mexico City, and Seville. Over the years he was able to assemble a large collection of Laffite documents in photostat; unfortunately, most of these were destroyed by fire in 1959.2

*The Journal of Jean Laffite* is a translation made from a 249 page French manuscript contained in a leather-bound book measuring 8½ x 13 x 1½ inches. This "journal" was originally a blank book and has printed advertisements for the Laflin Gun
Powder Company on the first and last pages. There are two paintings inside the front and back covers, one of Matthew Laflin, the other unidentified but with the dates "1785-1828." The first page of the Journal carries a handwritten inscription in English from Matthew Laflin to "John Laffitte, Esq.", dated Charleston, South Carolina, 23 August, 1835. All of the entries made by Jean Laffite in this journal are in French. Clippings from several contemporary newspapers are found interspersed throughout the memoir; these do not appear in the published Journal.

The translators of the Journal were called upon to use a certain amount of literary license in their rendering of Laffite's autobiography into English because of the author's archaic French and frequently confusing phraseology. For example: in his inventory of men and supplies furnished Jackson's army at New Orleans, Laffite lists such items as 6,400 kilos de poudre, 1720 kgs de pierres a fusil and 800 hommes au feu. In the translation, poudre and pierres a fusil become "gunpowder" and "gunflints", respectively, while hommes au feu (literally "men of fire") is rendered "men in the Army." Jean Laffite's spelling and punctuation also leave something to be desired, although his French is very good, indicating some kind of formal education. There is no chronology to the memoir; in places it is garbled, the account wandering, jump-
ing back and forth to different times and places. The translation retains these ambiguities.

The other large journal was also blank when Jean Laffite got it; it has the same dimensions as the memoir journal described above. It is not entirely filled in and contains a number of passages in English written by the children of Pierre Laffite. The French portions of this journal remain untranslated and there are no plans for publication.

The two family Bibles were published in 1820 and 1832; they measure roughly 4 x 7 x 2 1/2 and 5 x 8 x 2 1/2 inches respectively. These Bibles contain many pages of genealogical information, dates and places of births, baptisms, marriages, deaths. The Saints Bible (New York: Societe Biblique Americaine, 1820) is best known because of the oft-quoted "en secret" inscription on the frontpiece from Jean Laffite to his beloved Emma Mortimore.

Included among the small "journals" in the Simpson collection are two slender volumes of prose and poetry kept by the Laffite children. One of these "prose and poetry books," evidently owned by Laffite's son, Jules, has some entries written in French signed "Jn Laffite" and lines of verse from the pens of Matthew Laflin, Edward Eugene Laffite, and others. In addition to the Laffite passages there are short compositions by several prominent persons; most conspicuous are those of Wade Hampton (1831), David Crockett (1835), and Andrew
Jackson (1839). Jules Laffite's prose and poetry book has about sixty pages and measures $5 \times 7\frac{1}{2} \times 1$ inches.

The other prose and poetry book, inscribed by Jean Laffite in Charleston in 1850, was kept by the privateer's niece, Denise Laffite Little. Like Jules' book, this small notebook is mostly poetry, with signed compositions by Lois Ann and Denise Little, Charles, Eunice, and Eugene Laffite, in addition to many anonymous entries. It has forty-six manuscript pages and is slightly larger than the Jules Laffite prose and poetry book above. Neither of these remarkable little books have been published. The Jean Laffite material in them has not received the attention of competent translators.

Another of these minor journals is a ledger, filled with the names and dates of service of several hundred Laffite associates, agents, ship captains, &c. There is also a list, eleven pages long, of ships captured by the Laffite brothers and captains employed by them; a tally shows 71 prizes for Pierre and Jean (37 Spanish, 24 English, and 8 of other nationalities) and another 35 for "Oncle" Rene Beluche and brother Alexandre Frederick (alias Dominique You). There are no plans for publishing any of the notebooks, ledgers, and small journals presently owned by Mr. Simpson.

When he purchased the Journals of Jean Laffite, Mr. Simpson obtained a number of miscellaneous documents from the Laffite family papers. These include a remarkable group of
letters from Jean Laffite's private correspondence: letters written to and received from such famous men as Wade Hampton, Manuel Lisa, Joseph Robidoux, and Abraham Lincoln. There are letters from Jean Laffite to his family, written during his trip to Europe in 1845, describing his meetings with socialist philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Taken as a whole, these documents offer important insight into the character of one of American history's greatest enigmas. Unfortunately, only a handful of these letters have been published; Arthur's Jean Laffite, Gentlemen Rover has facsimile reproductions of a small part of this correspondence.

William Simpson accepts the Laffite Journal as genuine from the purely physical standpoint that the paper and ink are of the correct age, i.e., more than one hundred and thirty years old. This judgment is backed up by a preponderance of evidence favoring the Journal's authenticity which, in his opinion, outweigh some negative aspects and circumstances connected with the John A. Laffite collection.

As a professional documents dealer, Bill Simpson has many ways of detecting fakes, learned from handling more than 100,000 old manuscripts over more than twenty years. The physical appearance of the Jean Laffite memoir cannot be duplicated, either by using brown ink or any other forger's concoction; the paper itself is of the heavy linen-base type used only up until the middle of the nineteenth century,
when the acid-treated linen-pulp paper in use today was developed. The ferrous ink used by Jean Laffite has actually rusted, causing the words to rise slightly above the paper; the iron oxide has permeated the paper, leaving an indelible imprint that will not wash out. (A drastic test of an old manuscript's genuineness is to simply wash it: forged handwriting dissolves from the surface of old linen paper, and pulp paper quickly disintegrates.) Test with chemicals, and heat have failed to duplicate this phenomenon. Samples, allegedly taken from the Laffite Journal, were certified authentic in age by the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress and an independent testing laboratory.

Richard Santos, Bexar County Archivist in San Antonio, Texas, examined the Journals of Jean Laffite in July, 1969, just before their sale to Mr. Simpson. Mr. Santos reported finding many hitherto unknown facts in the memoir, which he described in a letter to William Simpson dated 7 July, 1969. By inference, the Bexar County Archivist pronounced the Jean Laffite collection authentic.

Mr. Ralph O. Queen, a nationally recognized handwriting expert, examined the Laffite Journal manuscript on several occasions during the summer of 1974. Mr. Queen, now retired and living at the resort community of Leander, Texas, has impressive credentials: more than forty years' experience in criminal investigation and handwriting identification for
the Houston Police Department, the State of Texas, and the Federal Government. He is also a member of the International Association for Identification, an organization whose membership is limited to persons with extensive legal experience in detecting forgeries.

Two pages from the memoir manuscript were removed at random. (The entries dated 7 October, 1846, and 24 September, 1849, both signed by Jean Laffite.) The handwriting in the memoir was then subjected to intensive study and a handwriting comparison was made, using other Jean Laffite manuscripts which are generally accepted as authentic. The three authentic Laffite documents used by Mr. Queen in his analysis of the Laffite memoir were the so-called "Le Brave Document", dated 18 August, 1819, Jean Laffite's letter to Gen. James "Yong," dated 7 July, 1819, and Laffite's letter to Gen. James Long, dated 30 September, 1819.

Mr. Queen found that the handwriting in Jean Laffite's Journal not only has the same outward appearance of the genuine Laffite manuscripts, but upon microscopic examination was found to have identical characteristics of letter formation. Forgers' attempts at handwriting duplication are best detected by enlarging selected letters in the suspect document three times their original size, then making comparisons with enlargements made from authentic manuscripts. Mr. Queen applied this process to the Laffite Journal and discovered that
although more than twenty years had elapsed between the writing of the Le Brave Document and the Laffite memoir, there was no appreciable change in letter formation, slant, or even pen direction. It is Mr. Queen's opinion that the Laffite Journal, the Le Brave Document, and the Laffite letters in the Lamar Papers were all from the pen of the same man.13

In conclusion, it should be noted that despite its shortcomings, The Journal of Jean Laffite is an extremely important and useful primary source, the only known account of Jean Laffite's life in his own words. On the basis of the manuscripts' physical appearance, and the wealth of historical information contained in many of the documents, the consensus among historians is that the Journals of Jean Laffite are authentic. Regarding the future of the collection, it is hoped that the memoir will be subjected to a more competent translation and careful editing under the guidance of an historian thoroughly familiar with the life and times of Jean Laffite.

Notes

2 More of Mr. Laffite's family papers were lost in another fire, occurring on the night of 16-17 May, 1960, at the offices of WSPA-TV in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Spartanburg Herald, Tuesday, 17 May, 1960.


4 The Crockett and Jackson items are actually short poems.

5 The two Abraham Lincoln letters, dated New Salem, Illinois, 21 December, 1835, and Washington, 11 November, 1847, are addressed to John Mortimore of St. Louis, Jean Laffite's brother-in-law.

6 Arthur, pp. 230-231, 244-245, 247-250, 253, 263-264, 268, 270.

7 David C. Mearns (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) to Mr. ______ (Laffite?), Washington, 5 September, 1956. (Copy in possession of the author.)

8 L. E. Harris (Director, Harris Laboratories, Inc.) to Lula Surrat, Lincoln, Nebraska, 2 June, 1955. (Copy in possession of the author.)

10 The "Le Brave Document" is a four-page manuscript signed by Jean Laffite, dated Galveston, 18 August, 1819. The document itself is an agreement between Laffite and the captain of the Mexican corsair El Bravo, Jean Desfarges, concerning the division of spoils. The document was taken from the Bravo when the schooner was captured by the U. S. Revenue Cutter Alabama on 30 August, 1819. The crew was tried for piracy in New Orleans; Desfarges and his mate were eventually hung, but the others were spared the gallows by order of President Monroe. Original in Federal Records Center, Fort Worth, Texas, in the archives of the U. S. District Court, New Orleans, Case Number 1440, styled "United States vs John Desfarges, et. al." (1819). See Arthur, pp. 194-201, for facsimile reproduction and an English translation.

11 Document Number 19 in the Mirabeau B. Lamar Papers, Texas Archives (Austin). It is generally believed that "Gen. Yong" was actually General James Long, an American filibuster who invaded Texas twice in 1819-1821.

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