Contemporary Descriptions of Jean Lafitte

Compiled by John Howells

1. Esau Glasscock diary: 1809

"But it was in the gaming-room adjoining the ballroom that Esau saw the Lafittes. Pierre, he recognized at once, and his father introduced him to the younger brother. Esau fell under the spell of his personality at once. 'He is tall, with pale skin, and he has large dark eyes... He is clean-shaven except for a beard extending party-way down his cheeks.'"(1)

2. William C. C. Claiborne proclamation: 1813

"John Lafite is about five feet ten inches high; stout made; about thirty-six years of age, slightly pitted with the small pox; has brown hair and black eyes. He has a little impediment in his speech; is a Frenchman by birth, but speaks tolerably good English."(2)

3. An officer of U. S. Brig Enterprise: 1839

"My description of this renowned chieftain, to correspond with the original, will shock the preconceived notions of many who have hitherto pictured him as the hero of a novel or a melodrama. I am compelled by truth to introduce him as a stout, rather gentlemanly personage, some five feet ten inches in height, dressed very simply in a foraging cap and blue frock coat of a most villainous fit; his complexion, like most Creoles, olive; his countenance full, mild, and rather impressive, but for a small black eye, which now and then, as he grew animated in conversation, would flash in a way which impressed me with a notion that Il Capitano might be when roused, a very ugly customer."(3)

4. William D. C. Hall: 1857

"Col. Hall found him one of the most prepossessing men he had ever met with, both in personal appearance and address. Lafitte was six feet and two inches high, and his figure one of remarkable symmetry, with feet and hands so small, compared with his large stature, as to attract attention. In his deportment he was remarkably bland, dignified and social towards equals, though reserved and silent towards inferiors, or those under his command. He received visitors with an easy air of welcome and profuse hospitality. He wore no uniform, but dressed fashionably, and was remarkably neat in his personal appearance. On board of his vessel he usually wore a loose coat with nothing to distinguish him from his subordinates. He spoke English correctly, but with a marked French accent that at once indicated his nativity, though it perhaps
imparted additional interest to his conversation. He possessed superior conversational powers, and entertained his guests with the rehearsal of many original and amusing anecdotes. He had a remarkable habit of closing one eye while in conversation, and keeping it closed so much, that many who had but a slight acquaintance with him were firmly impressed with the belief that he had the use of but one eye."(4)

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(2) Proclamation dated November 24, 1813, offering $500 reward for John Lafite [sic] for "grievously wounding" a revenue officer. Published in Courrier de la Louisiane/Courrier of Louisiana.


(4) Col. J. S. Thrasher, "Early History of Galveston," in Galveston City Directory, 1859-60; a mounted copy of this article is in the archives of the Rosenberg Library.