

THE LAFITTES AND THEIR ACTIVITIES ON THE LOWER  
MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND GULF COAST

THE LAFITTES AND THEIR ACTIVITIES ON THE LOWER  
MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND GULF COAST

OKLAHOMA  
AGRICULTURE & MECHANICAL COLLEGE  
LIBRARY  
JUL 17 1937

By

Truman Wilfred Mauck

Bachelor of Arts

Southwestern College

Winfield, Kansas

1932

Submitted to the Department of History  
Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS  
1937

LIBRARY  
A. B. COLLEGE  
STILLWATER, OKLA.

OKLAHOMA  
AGRICULTURE & MECHANICAL COLLEGE  
LIBRARY  
JUL 17 1937

APPROVED:

G. B. Hawkins  
In Charge of Thesis

T. H. Reynolds  
Head of the Department of History

D. C. McIntosh  
Dean of the Graduate School

## PREFACE

In an earnest effort to present some acceptable service to those who are interested in early American History, the writer discovered that he had selected a most fascinating subject. If he has portrayed the chief characters in such a manner that the reader finds them of interest, then the writer will feel that his labors have not been in vain.

The writer takes this opportunity to thank Dr. Glenn B. Hawkins, Professor of History, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Stillwater, Oklahoma, for his careful guidance and assistance in selecting and furnishing material for this thesis. He wishes also to show appreciation for the courtesies extended by the staffs of the various libraries where this research has been conducted, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Tulane University, and Rosenberg Library of Galveston; and to many other persons who have made this study possible, he expresses his gratification.

Truman Wilfred Mauck

## CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter I. The Blacksmiths Become Outlaws	1
Chapter II. The Patriots	23
Chapter III. The Lafittes, After New Orleans	46

THE LAFITTES AND THEIR ACTIVITIES ON THE LOWER  
MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND GULF COAST

Chapter I

Blacksmiths Become Outlaws

Shortly after the purchase of Louisiana by the United States in 1803, a number of events occurred which made the Gulf of Mexico one of the most extensive and profitable privateering districts in the New World.<sup>1</sup> First, the war in Europe between France and Spain gave the inhabitants of the French West Indies a good pretense to prey upon the commerce of Spain, since by this time the Spanish Colonial authorities were too weak to offer much resistance. Commissions were easily obtained, either by gift or purchase, by the subjects of any nation from the French authorities at Martinique. At that time there were apparently no scruples against privateering. In fact, many capitalists were willing to invest their means in such an enterprise because of the big dividends frequently paid. Hence, the privateer, buccaneer, adventurer, patriot, and pirate flocked to these insular officials to procure commissions and use their islands as bases for operations.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>

DeBow's Review of the Southern and Western States, New Orleans and Washington City, 1855, XIX, 147.

<sup>2</sup>

Ibid. Frances Xavier Martin, History of Louisiana, from the Earliest Period, New Orleans, 1882, p. 361.

Not long after this Columbia declared her independence and, desperately in need of man power, invited similar classes of individuals to her port of Cartagena. These men, she reasoned, could be used in helping her to win an independent status. Commissions, therefore, were forthcoming to the migrants and the Columbian flag became their colors.<sup>3</sup>

A little later the occupation of Guadeloupe by the British changed the aspect of the situation. The privateers could no longer return to their bases of operations in the West Indies, nor could they any longer obtain commissions which placed the trade on a semi-legal foundation. A new haven for their operations was forthwith needed; and Barataria appeared as the most acceptable rendezvous.<sup>4</sup>

Barataria Bay is situated on the southwest coast of Louisiana, about sixty miles from New Orleans. In front of this bay, and separating it from the Gulf of Mexico, lies an island, called Grand Terre, which is about six miles long and three miles wide. Situated as it is at the entrance to the bay, in which a good harbor was then available, fortifications, strategically located on the island, could easily guard the Great Pass of Barataria. This pass was not only narrow, but shallow as well, for in

---

<sup>3</sup>

DeBow's Review, loc. cit., Martin, op. cit., p. 362.

<sup>4</sup>

Major A. Lacarriere Latour, Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana in 1814-1815, Philadelphia, 1816, p. 12.

it there were only nine or ten feet of water. From this harbor in Barataria Bay communication could be had with a number of contiguous lakes, lagoons, canals, and streams leading to the Mississippi or the sea. Surrounding this bay were many swamps and forests, which provided an impenetrable obstacle to storms, enemies and government officials. Indeed it offered a most tempting field of operation to the "Robin Hoods" of the sea.<sup>5</sup> Here they could restore the health of their crews, build depots for their spoils, and, most important of all, the smugglers could take from it their booty by way of the bayous, canals, lakes, and streams to New Orleans.<sup>6</sup> It was a wise individual who selected Barataria Bay and the little island of Grand Terre as a base for privateering.<sup>7</sup>

The people of Louisiana and especially those of New Orleans were willing to buy the spoils of the smugglers. Their contacts with such individuals had extended back to early colonial days. Such trade had never been seriously discouraged. During the French occupation of the lower Mississippi, the uncertainty of supplies from the mother country made smuggling a necessity and under the rigid tariff policy of Spain it had flourished. At the time of the acquisition of Louisiana by the United States,

---

5

Charles Gayaree, History of Louisiana, New Orleans, 1866, IV, 304.

6

Ibid. Latour, op. cit., pp. 13-14; Martin, op. cit., p. 361.

7

DeBow's Review, XIX, 147, 148.

smuggling relations had long been established. They had<sup>8</sup>  
become a part of the citizen's established habits.

There were no scruples, seemingly, against trading with smugglers in Louisiana. Governor Claiborne, as late as 1813, expressed his feeling on this indifferent attitude when he wrote:

....I have been at great pains to convince the people of this state, that smuggling was a moral offense; But in this I have only partly succeeded.--There are Individuals here who, in every other respect, fulfil with exemplary integrity all the duties devolving upon them as Fathers of Families and as Citizens;-- but as regards Smuggling, altho' they may not be personally concerned, they attach no censure to those who are.--It is the influence of education of habit of bad example....<sup>9</sup>

The exceptionally low prices of smuggled goods had its effect upon the amount of the traffic by serving as a stimulant. The initial cost of the articles and the absence of duties made it possible for them to be sold far cheaper than legitimate goods. Usually there is a friendly relationship between a purveyor of cheap goods and the consumer. This relationship, plus a ready market, brought about a union of merchants and smugglers for the express purpose of profit and protection.<sup>10</sup> A planter or trader, who could buy slaves in Barataria for \$150 or \$200 that would cost at least \$600 in New Orleans, was quite willing to join

<sup>8</sup>

Grace King, New Orleans, The Place and the People, New York, 1915, pp. 190, 191.

<sup>9</sup>

Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne, Dunbar Rowland, Jackson, Mississippi, 1917, VI, 301.

<sup>10</sup>

King, op. cit., p. 191.

the collusion.<sup>11</sup> Because the planter, trader or merchant could save money by such trading, universal sentiment was<sup>12</sup> in favor of the traffic.

While the Constitution of the United States prohibited the importation of slaves after 1808, the opening of new regions and the price of commodities augmented the demand for them. Slaves on the legal market were high; yes, too high for many small planters to purchase. For these reasons, slaves, which could be obtained by the privateers, either direct from Africa or by the capture of Spanish slave ships, were brought in and sold in great numbers to<sup>13</sup> eager residents.

When the United States acquired Louisiana, many new citizens of French and Spanish stock came under its jurisdiction. It is little wonder that these new citizens of the United States, who still retained their prejudices and foreign customs, should violate the custom laws,<sup>14</sup> especially when it was profitable to do so.

Such was in part the social and economic conditions of Louisiana when the Lafitte brothers, Pierre and Jean, came

<sup>11</sup>

Vincent Nolte, Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres, New York, 1854, p. 189.

<sup>12</sup>

Rowland, op. cit., II, 238.

<sup>13</sup>

Lyle Saxon, Lafitte the Pirate, New York, 1932, p. 26; John R. Spears, Lafitte the Last of the Buccaneers, Outing Magazine, LVIII, 242-248.

<sup>14</sup>

Henry C. Castellanos, New Orleans as it Was, New York, 1895, p. 305.

15  
to America. The Lafittes, who were natives of France,  
fitted in well with the French population of Louisiana.  
Jean was born in 1770, but nothing is known as to the date  
of Pierres' birth. Little is known of their life before  
1808, when they were first noticed in New Orleans,  
except that they were aliens.

Jean, due to his superior mental and physical being,  
was a natural born leader of men. He was tall, unusually  
strong, handsome, quick witted, and intelligent. He was  
a captivating talker, cunning actor, and an expert with the  
foils. Pierre, though not quite as tall as Jean, was  
little less deficient than his brother in manly attributes,  
except that he was more given to drink and women. These  
natural accomplishments account for their success in dealing  
with their fellow associates.

Their entrance into Louisiana came by the way of the

15

The brothers spelled their name Laffite in their early  
correspondence. Latour, op. cit. In their later corres-  
pondence the brothers spelled their name Lafitte. I have  
adopted the spelling used in an original letter written  
July 7, 1819, by Jean Lafitte of Galveston Island, to James  
Long. Latour, op. cit., App. XV.

16

The Story of Jean and Pierre Lafitte, The Pirate--Patriots,  
New Orleans, p. 1. (Louisiana State Museum, Issued by the  
Cabildo on Dit.) Cited in future as Story of Jean and Pierre.

17

Register VI, Folio 117, No. 486, (Archives of St. Louis  
Cathedral), New Orleans.

18

Story of Jean and Pierre, op. cit., p. 2.

19

H. Yoakum, History of Texas, New York, 1856, 196; Saxon,  
op. cit., pp. 13-15.

West Indies. New Orleans may have been visited by them as early as 1804;<sup>20</sup> but from the scope of their activities in 1809, it is evident that they must have arrived at a much earlier date.<sup>21</sup> When their presence became an object of concern at that time, they owned and operated a blacksmith shop on St. Phillip Street in New Orleans.<sup>22</sup> Previously they had formed connections with some of the smugglers at Barataria and now they were serving as their marketing agents in New Orleans. The blacksmith shop was used as a blind; not unlike the methods employed by the bootleggers of our prohibition days.

It was a well known fact, that a purchaser could select slaves from the dark-skinned Africans who worked in the blacksmith shop.<sup>23</sup> If by chance there were not enough slaves in the shop to supply the demand, Jean would assure his customer that others would be available presently--in fact, as soon as a trip could be made to Barataria. Sometimes, however, when the customer was very exacting in his demands he was conveyed to the place of hibernation, and the "stock" was presented for consideration.<sup>24</sup> Before the

<sup>20</sup>

Rowland, op. cit., II, 97.

<sup>21</sup>

Story of Jean and Pierre, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>22</sup>

DeBow's Review, 1852, XII, 112; Alcee Fortier, History of Louisiana, New York, 1904, III, 85, 86.

<sup>23</sup>

Fortier, op. cit., III, 85, 86; Saxon, op. cit., p. 6; Walter B. Lister, "Portrait of a Pirate," American Mercury, New York, VII, 214.

<sup>24</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., p. 24.

year 1809 came to a close, business was so good that the blacksmith shop was no longer adequate to accommodate their trade. Expansion of quarters was necessary. Forthwith, one was opened on Royal Street, where they displayed linens, silks, and other illegal goods not in harmony with the coarser goods marketed from their blacksmith shop headquarters. Ere long the brothers were rich, not only in tangible property, but intangible as well, for they possessed the friendship of rich planters, merchants, and capitalists.<sup>25</sup>

Until 1810 Jean and Pierre Lafitte acted only as agents of the smugglers. At that time internal discord among the smugglers made it necessary for them to make numerous trips to Barataria, in order to assist in the pacification of the discordant factions.<sup>26</sup>

The older inhabitants of Barataria were then receiving strong competition from the newly arrived privateers, who came from the West Indies in such large numbers that the population was doubled in that vicinity. The new privateers and older smugglers of Barataria had separate interests. Consequently, two distinct groups were formed and the two factions were soon fighting one another in a fashion similar to gang warfare in our larger cities. This struggle led to serious destruction and bloodshed, for they attacked each others ships while they were out at sea, sank them, and

---

<sup>25</sup>

Ibid., pp. 16, 17.

<sup>26</sup>

Ibid., p. 31.

brought in the spoils for sale.

In October, 1810, a truce, however, was declared in Barataria. The two parties agreed that there should be some sort of government or code of laws set up and enforced for their mutual benefit. Representatives from both groups were sent to the Lafittes, with the object of using them as conciliators; and, after considering their proposals, Jean<sup>28</sup> decided the issues and cast his lot with the united group.

In order to take up privateering Jean, therefore, fitted out a ship and sailed to Cartagena, where he was able to obtain a letter of marque. Through his acquaintances and dexterity he was acknowledged, before the end of the year,<sup>29</sup> the leader of the freebooters. With his position firmly established, a reorganization of his personnel was begun. Dominique You and Beluche, both recent arrivals in Louisiana, and close friends, were accepted as lieutenants in the new<sup>30</sup> set up.

As a means of guiding the organization more efficiently, Jean, in the spring of 1811, built for himself a home on Grand Terre. Here he completed the organization of his heterogeneous peoples of Barataria, held frequent council

---

<sup>27</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>

Ibid.; Castellanos, op. cit., p. 305.

<sup>29</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., p. 32; DeBow's Review, XIX, 149; King, op. cit., pp. 192, 193.

<sup>30</sup>

Stanley Clisby Arthur, The Battle of New Orleans, New Orleans, 1915, p. 42; Nolte, op. cit., p. 189; Castellanos, op. cit., p. 88.

with their leaders in order to pacify the discontented, and extended to all of them courtesies that made his name popular. The island, as the next step in his plan, was fortified, and the ships of "prey" were equipped with guns. So popular in fact was the rendezvous that these men of diverse ideas and exotic temperament joined his settlement. Within a year they numbered approximately 1000 men.<sup>31</sup>

Many richly laden prize ships were brought into the port, of Baratavia, from time to time. Some were filled with silks and spices from India, others with goods of every description, even some with wares of English manufacture. Slaves, which before 1810 were either purchased from dealers in Cuba or stolen in Africa, were now procured as opportunity afforded from Spanish slave ships off the coast of Cuba or from unprotected West India slave owners. This method of procuring the dark skinned vassels reduced the first cost to a nominal sum and since it eliminated a long costly journey to Africa, they could be sold at a reasonable price and still produce a lavish profit in New Orleans.<sup>32</sup> Illicit commerce and all its concomitant evils, therefore, were encouraged.

The governmental authorities, as well as everyone else in Louisiana, were cognizant of this unusual intercourse. For some reason or other, little effort was exercised in

---

<sup>31</sup>

DeBow's Review, XIX, 149; Saxon, op. cit., pp. 34-50.

<sup>32</sup>

DeBow's Review, XIX, 149.

curtailing it until the volume had increased to major proportions. Then, it was not Governor Claiborne who made the protest, but the territorial secretary, Thomas Robertson. In a letter to President Madison on September 6, 1810 he asserted:

You have no doubt heard of the late introduction of African slaves among us. Two cargoes have been already smuggled into this Territory by way of Barataria and Bayou Lafourche, and I am fully convinced from a variety of circumstances which have come to my knowledge, that an extensive and well-laid plan exists to evade and defeat the operation of the laws of the United States on the subject. The open and daring course which is now pursued by a set of brigands who infest our coast, and overrun our country, is calculated to excite the strongest indignation in the breast of every man who feels the slightest respect for the wise and politic institutions under which we live. At this moment, upwards of one hundred slaves are held by some of our own citizens in the very teeth of the most positive laws, and notwithstanding every exertion which has been made, so general seems to be the disposition to aid in the concealment, that but faint hopes are entertained of detecting the parties and bringing them to punishment.<sup>33</sup>

It seems that this proclamation did little constructive work except to advertise the activities of the Lafittes,<sup>34</sup> for in December, 1810, two whole cargoes of slaves were sold in Louisiana,<sup>35</sup> and a consistent stream of buyers came to Grand Terre to make purchases. So general was the trade that even officers of the United States Army went to the Barataria canal, purchased clothing supplies, principally

---

<sup>33</sup>

Gayarre, op. cit., III, 228, 229.

<sup>34</sup>

Ibid., III, 228, 229.

<sup>35</sup>

Latour, op. cit., pp. 14, 15; Saxon, op. cit., p. 46.

and had them transported in carts to their quarters. <sup>36</sup>

In January, 1811, a slave insurrection broke out in the parish of St. John, the Baptist. Since it extended rapidly to other communities, the number of rebels involved increased to approximately five hundred. Under popular leaders they organized themselves into companies and advanced as separate units along the river toward New Orleans. When news of the insurrection arrived in that city, great excitement was evidenced. The state militia was called into service, and, with the aid of the United States troops, it was successful in putting down the insurgents, but not, however, until sixty five slaves were killed. After the revolt had been brought under control sixteen Africans were presented for trial for precipitating the disorder in New Orleans. Evidence so incriminating was presented that they were convicted and beheaded. The heads of these unfortunate individuals were placed on poles along the roads leading from New Orleans, as a warning to other unruly slaves who might think of rebelling against their masters. <sup>37</sup>

Some of the citizens seemed to think that the insurrection was due to slaves that had been lately introduced into the vicinity. Consequently, a formal investigation was held by a deliberative body, and the trouble was placed at the door of the Lafittes. Probably the decision of the

---

<sup>36</sup>

Castellanos, op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>37</sup>

Fortier, op. cit., III, 78, 79.

committee was true, for the Lafittes had smuggled many hundreds of slaves into these communities; many of whom<sup>38</sup> were little short of being desperate characters. The citizens of the New Orleans district, however, soon forgot this incident and apparently held no grudge against the Lafittes.<sup>39</sup>

Jean Lafitte's enterprise, at this time, extended from Natchez to New Orleans and from Pensacola to the Sabine River.<sup>40</sup> And since it had expanded over such a large area, he was compelled to be very active, to associate with almost every class in society, and to be a jolly good fellow at all times. At the country dances or the fashionable quadroom balls, which he often attended, he appeared perfect mannered, well dressed, charming, and a favorite with the women. But he was not after women; he was after professional contacts that would lead to business. Regardless of his demeanor, plans were being constantly constructed in his fertile brain by which these public demonstrations could abet his pet policies.

During the period immediately proceeding the second war with Great Britain, Pierre acted only as salesman and delivery man for the establishment at Barataria.<sup>41</sup> In

---

<sup>38</sup> Saxon, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 48; Arthur, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>41</sup> Louisiana Courier (New Orleans), May 4, 1812, contains an advertisement by Jean Lafitte for a lost pocketbook which had in it papers signed by Pierre Lafitte. This might indicate that Pierre was an agent at the time for the Lafitte establishment in New Orleans.

this capacity it was not necessary for him to take an active part in social affairs; however, he was often seen drinking and talking with his associates in the saloons of New Orleans where orders for merchandise could be obtained. He seemed not as colorful as his brother, for he was cross-eyed, frequently well saturated with liquor, and women of a questionable character were his companions.<sup>42</sup> This weakness is<sup>43</sup> proved by his social relations with his various mistresses.

The Lafittes had powerful connections in New Orleans through friends who ranked high in official and financial circles. Some of these are worth noting: Sauvinet, the wealthy banker, was a staunch supporter of the brothers and helped care for their financial matters;<sup>44</sup> Auguste Leclerc, the publisher, held them in high esteem, so high in fact, that he often permitted Jean to publish parodies of Napoleon's proclamations in his paper;<sup>45</sup> Devezac, a rich merchant, and the brother-in-law of Edward Livingston, who was a bosom friend of Governor Claiborne, enjoyed their company. That the Lafittes had intimate relations with these men is proved by Vincent Nolte, the traveling merchant, who wrote of seeing the Lafittes and their lieutenants parading "arm in

---

<sup>42</sup>

Pierre had, at different times, two known negro mistresses. Jean also had at least one. All of these women bore children who were baptized in the St. Louis Cathedral, Register VI, Folio 117, No. 486.

<sup>43</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., pp. 52-60.

<sup>44</sup>

Nolte, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>45</sup>

Ibid.

arm" through the streets of New Orleans with some of them.<sup>46</sup>  
 John R. Grimes, the new district attorney, who, Governor  
 Claiborne said, was a "young man of great promise,"<sup>47</sup> un-  
 doubtedly had a knowledge of the various activities of the  
 Lafittes, yet he was often seen drinking with them in  
 Tremoult's Coffee House.<sup>48</sup> John Blaque, one of the  
 framers of the state constitution,<sup>49</sup> and a member of the  
 state legislature, had the confidence of the brothers, as  
 shown by their later correspondence.<sup>50</sup> Jean Robert Marie  
 Humbert, Napoleon's exiled general, who was quite popular  
 with the French element in New Orleans, disclosed his  
 friendship for the Lafittes by inviting them, on one  
 occasion,<sup>51</sup> to his birthday dinner.

But Jean Lafitte also had enemies of whom he must  
 have been aware, since vague stories of piracy were being  
 whispered around in New Orleans concerning the many ships  
 which had been disappearing in calm weather in the Gulf of  
 Mexico. On that account many people were afraid to leave  
 Louisiana for northern ports. The enmity of the customs  
 officers had been aroused, and they were now voicing their  
 opinions.<sup>52</sup> A shortage of money occurred about this time

---

<sup>46</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Rowland, op. cit., V, 240; Saxon, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>48</sup> Saxon, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>49</sup> Fortier, op. cit., III, 80.

<sup>50</sup> Latour, op. cit., app., p. XII.

<sup>51</sup> Saxon, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 49; King, op. cit., pp. 194, 195.

which affected everyone. Some blamed the smugglers for the financial stringency, since planters and merchants always paid in coin and the Baratarians stowed it away in chests, out of circulation.<sup>53</sup> By this time even high officials were taking notice of events, for on June 7, 1811, Governor Claiborne wrote to Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury, that a number of slaves were expected from Mobile other than through the regular channels.<sup>54</sup> The customs laws, therefore, were openly violated. Claiborne's protest apparently carried some influence for in the President's third annual message to Congress, November 5, 1811, attention was called to the smuggler and to the disobedience of customs laws, everywhere so "odious."<sup>55</sup>

Jean Lafitte knew that he might be called upon to account for a certain portion of the tragedies that happened in the maritime piratical areas. Since he hated the name of piracy, his efforts were employed in such a way that no one could bring any charge against him, other than that of smuggling. With this motive in mind he called a meeting of his lieutenants at Grand Terre and warned them against preying upon American ships. One of his men questioned his authority in the matter, and a shooting ensued in which

---

<sup>53</sup>

Nolte, op. cit., p. 189.

<sup>54</sup>

Rowland, op. cit., V, 267.

<sup>55</sup>

A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1908, James C. Richardson, Washington, 1909, I, 494, 495.

the dissenter was killed. Others who disagreed with Jean<sup>56</sup> were afraid to act contrary to the wishes of the "boss."

The spring and summer of 1812 passed along smoothly for the Lafittes. Meanwhile, their forces and business increased. Claiborne's appeal to the federal authorities had been denied, so he was unable to curtail their volume of trade. The supply of contraband goods was plentiful. A larger number of prizes were brought into port almost simultaneously, and since the restless nature of the privateers compelled them to be active, more prize ships were in the offering. In order to combat the influence of the government, the price of the goods was lowered, more sales were made, and the "public" was satisfied. The Lafittes, therefore, enjoyed another peaceful season of business.

But Governor Claiborne had been successful in organizing a small coast guard by prodding up the custom officials. This guard, which contained a force of about forty men and a few small boats, was organized under Captain Andrew Hunter Holmes. Sometime in September, Captain Holmes and his crew started patrolling the water<sup>57</sup> passages between Barataria and New Orleans.

When Jean Lafitte heard that the small force under Captain Holmes was attempting to curtail his activities, he laughed. What could an insignificant force of forty

---

<sup>56</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., pp. 49-51.

<sup>57</sup>

Ibid., p. 64.

men do to his force of nearly 1000 men? Nevertheless, he strengthened his fort, set his cannons, and prepared for action.<sup>58</sup>

To further guard his future course, scouting parties were dispatched to locate his would-be oppressor. With the camp of Captain Holmes located, Jean and Pierre stationed lookouts at strategic points in order that the contraband could be delivered without obstruction.<sup>59</sup>

The brothers were successful, for a short time, in evading Captain Holmes by continually rerouting their pirogues and small boats, but on the night of November 16, 1812, while the moon was shining brightly, the two forces came together. On that evening the Lafittes, with about twenty men, were taking five small boats, loaded with loot, to the banks of the Mississippi River, when they were suddenly surrounded by the force of Captain Holmes. One of the Baratarians who tried to escape, was killed; the others, with their boats, were taken to New Orleans, where promptly released on bond.<sup>60</sup>

On Sunday, November 25, 1812, the streets of New Orleans were filled with people. They were listening

---

<sup>58</sup>

Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>59</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>

The court records of the Lafittes trial, with many other documents, were removed from the register in New Orleans for some unknown reason. They were lost for many years and when they reappeared they came into the possession of James B. Pelliter of New Orleans. Lyle Saxon had access to these documents and has reprinted some of these in entirety in his book, Lafitte the Pirate.

intently to a new story of piracy that was being gossiped about by a man named Williams who had recently arrived from Cuba. According to the narrative, Williams had been aboard a New England ship which was loaded with slaves. This ship was attacked by pirates off the coast of Cuba. After a short struggle the ship was captured, and the crew was murdered, but Williams had lived to relate his story in New Orleans. Since similar other stories had been told, the people began to wonder; could not the Lafittes, who were recently arrested, really be pirates? Before the heated arguments had progressed very far, Pierre and Jean appeared, at the psychological moment, on the streets near the Palace d'Armes dressed in their best. It was said that they were on their way to General Humbert's birthday dinner. Because they were handsome, well groomed, and polite, their appearance had a profound effect on their would-be accusers. The attitude of the crowd was changed, forthwith. Surely, they reasoned, such gentlemen, who associate with the best of society, could not be pirates. Furthermore, what sort of cargo did the New Englanders carry from the African coast that would invite piratical movements? Maybe these New Englanders, who engaged in the slave trade, if that were their mission, were no better than the Baratarians.<sup>61</sup>

District attorney Grimes made out a brief report concerning Williams' story. He recorded that an American

---

<sup>61</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., p. 67-80.

ship, carrying an unlawful load of slaves, had been attacked by pirates in the Gulf of Mexico. Reports of the incident soon found their way in the papers. The authorities, undoubtedly, read about it, but they did nothing. What reasons augured for passive action were well known, so Williams and his story were soon forgotten.<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile plans were maturing for hearing the evidence of Captain Holmes. On November 29, 1812, when the Lafittes trial was scheduled to be held, they did not appear, but instead sent Sauvinet, their banker, to represent them. Just what happened in the court room is hard to ascertain, but Captain Holmes, after being sworn, was placed on the stand, and told his story. From his testimony one concludes, that since only one of the five captured boats contained "contraband," the cargo of the others was jettisoned in an effort to destroy incriminating evidence. One also gathers that the smugglers were armed, for some guns were captured; but from the possessors' assertions they were only carried to "shoot ducks."<sup>63</sup>

From the court records it is evident that the accused did not appear before the court at all. Some time later, Grimes, acting as the State's Attorney, sent a petition to the Judge of the United States District Court of Louisiana setting forth this fact and in addition did "most

---

<sup>62</sup>

Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>63</sup>

Ibid., p. 85.

respectfully sheweth" that Jean Lafitte owed the United States the sum of \$12,014.52--a 300 percent fine on the value of the goods found in defiance of the custom laws in one small boat. The items, on which this levy was made, consisted of twenty six bales of cinnamon, fifty four linen shirts, three pieces of Russian sheeting, seven pieces of canvas, one bundle of twine, and one piece of handkerchiefs.<sup>64</sup>

It seems that the sheriff did not care to interfere with Jean's freedom or bring him before the bar of justice. Consequently the case dragged along without settlement. The judicial authorities, however, made attempts to force the sheriff to action, for on July 24, 1813, he was commanded, as he had "been often commanded," to arrest Jean Lafitte and bring him before the court which was to be held the third Monday in October.<sup>65</sup> Altogether, six such writs were issued, but they were all returned and marked<sup>66</sup> "not found in New Orleans."

After the Lafittes' first arrest, they devised a new method of disposing of their ill-gotten merchandise. Early in 1813, they began holding public sales at a place called The Temple not far from Grand Terre. These sales were advertised by handbills signed by the brothers, in which both slaves and merchandise were offered for sale.

---

<sup>64</sup>

Ibid., pp. 85-87.

<sup>65</sup>

Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>66</sup>

DeBow's Review, XIX, 150; Fortier, op. cit., p. 87.

Buyers flocked to these auctions, where values of such an unusual kind were offered that few could resist them. This method of vending, in time, was exceedingly successful. As the days passed, the Baratarians became bolder and bolder, and according to one good authority, Jean reasoned that he would just as soon drown in "ten feet of water as in six."<sup>67</sup>

Governor Claiborne must have heard of these auctions for on March 15, 1813, he issued a proclamation in which the Baratarians were commanded to cease their activities and disband. At the same time, the citizens of Louisiana were cautioned about trading with the Baratarians and asked to support officers of the law in their attempt to suppress the trade.<sup>68</sup> Two days later he wrote to General James Wilkinson asking for troops to quash the Baratarians.<sup>69</sup> Even though the Lafittes were not named in this proclamation, it is evident that their establishment was outlawed. The United States as well as Spain and England was now an enemy of the Lafittes.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Saxon, op. cit., pp. 90-94; Lister, op. cit., VII, 214.

<sup>68</sup> Rowland, op. cit., VI, 232, 233.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 216, 217.

<sup>70</sup> Saxon, op. cit., p. 95.

## Chapter II

### The Patriots

Even though the establishment of the Lafittes was outlawed, by Governor Claiborne's proclamation, on March 15, 1813, they continued to carry on their business as if nothing had happened.<sup>1</sup> Public sales were held in the customary manner, and, contrary to the law and the Governor's wishes, respectable residents, especially planters, continued to make their enterprise a success. On the streets of New Orleans, orders were taken and received in broad day light for merchandise from Barataria. There was as little attempt to conceal these orders as there was for similar orders from Philadelphia or New York. Though the custom officials were supposedly watchful, the goods that they seized were small in comparison to the total amount of illegitimate traffic, and their efforts on the whole were<sup>2</sup> ineffective as a remedy for smuggling.

Some of the citizens of Louisiana believed that the British were secretly encouraging the Lafittes and their crews to violate the custom laws of the United States, but this asserted charge was not true. That this statement is representative of the set-up is proved by the fact that British officials at different times tried to dislodge the

---

<sup>1</sup> Gayarre, op. cit., IV, 290, 301, 302.

<sup>2</sup> Latour, op. cit., pp. 14, 15; Rowland, op. cit., VI, 279, 280.

Baratarians, capture their prizes, and prevent their destruction of the British commerce.<sup>3</sup>

On one occasion, June 23, 1813, a British sloop of war anchored at the mouth of Bayou La Fourche, one of the avenues frequently used by the Lafittes. Immediately the British crew was ordered into small boats and sent out to capture two privateering vessels lying off Cat Island. The attack was made, but the privateers outnumbering the British crew made short shrift of them, even though they fought bravely. The British officer, cognizant of the heavy loss sustained, called his men aboard the ship of war and sailed away, leaving the privateers in possession of the anchorage.<sup>4</sup>

The friends and associates of the Lafittes paid as little attention to the proclamation of Governor Claiborne as did the brothers themselves. These accomplices afforded the Lafittes all the protection that was in their power. Invariably they warned them of impending raids, and upon learning of such manoeuvres they so intimidated the officers by threats that little forceful action was taken.<sup>5</sup>

On July 14, 1813, about a year after the Lafitte's first encounter with the law, they had a skirmish with custom officers not far from New Orleans. On this occasion, in open day, Jean was taking a schooner loaded with contraband

---

<sup>3</sup> Latour, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.; Gayarre, op. cit., IV, 304.

<sup>5</sup> Gayarre, op. cit., IV, 290; Rowland, op. cit., VI, 279, 280.

to New Orleans, when he was attacked by Walker Gilbert, a United States Custom officer, with a small force of men. This force was able to take possession of the schooner and hold it for a time; but the pirates soon rallied under Jean and recaptured the vessel. In the fracas one of the men of Gilbert's party was wounded and left in the swamp, while Jean took the cargo to New Orleans.

The Lafitte-Gilbert affair of July 14th seemingly aroused the ire of Governor Claiborne, for on November 24th a proclamation was issued in which he named Lafitte as the leader of this affair and offered a reward for his arrest. A portion of this proclamation, which shows their boldness of action, records:

Whereas the nefarious practice of running in Contraband Goods, which has hitherto prevailed in different parts of this State, to the great injury of the fair trade, and the diminution of the Revenue of the United States has of late much increased--

And Whereas, the violators of the Law--emboldened by the impunity of the past trespasses, no longer conceal themselves from the view of the honest part of the community but setting the Government at defiance, in broad daylight, openly carry on their infamous traffic; and Whereas, it has been officially known to me that on the fourteenth of last Month a quantity of contraband goods seized by Walker Gilbert, an officer of the revenue of the United States, was forcibly taken from him in open day at no great distance from the City of New Orleans by a party of armed Men, under the orders of a certain John Lafitte, who fired upon and grievously wounded one of the assistants of the said Walker Gilbert; and although process has been issued for the apprehension of him, the said John Lafitte, yet such is the countenance and protection afforded him, or the terror excited by the threats of himself and his associates, that the same remains unexecuted.--

And Whereas the apathy of good people of this State, in checking practices so opposed to morality, and to the Laws and interests of the United States, may impair the fair character which Louisiana maintains, and ought to preserve as a member of the American Union.<sup>7</sup>

A few influential men had boasted that the Governor dare not bring the brothers before the law, therefore, when this proclamation was posted in public places in New Orleans,<sup>8</sup> it caused open astonishment to some of the citizens.

Shortly after the posting of this proclamation Jean appeared on the streets of New Orleans. These men observed him reading the proclamation and smiling at its contents. His composure and his indifference to danger were very apparent. Truly, they aroused the admiration of the French Creoles.

Two days later other papers were found posted in the same places where Governor Claiborne's proclamation had appeared. These papers were cleverly worded in official language. However the name William Charles Cole Claiborne was inserted in the places where Jean Lafitte's had appeared, and a reward of \$1500<sup>9</sup> was now offered by Jean for the arrest and delivery of Governor Claiborne to Grand Terre.<sup>10</sup>

This proclamation of the Governor was as ineffective as its predecessor, for the Lafittes did not discontinue

---

<sup>7</sup> Rowland, op. cit., VI, 279, 280.

<sup>8</sup> Saxon, op. cit., pp. 101-103.

<sup>9</sup> Some writers assert that Jean offered a larger reward. Herbert Howe Bancroft, History of the North American States and Texas, San Francisco, 1889, XVI, 40.

<sup>10</sup> Saxon, op. cit., pp. 102, 103.

their smuggling and selling of goods at Grand Terre. Once again Governor Claiborne became officially "blind" to their activities. Some of his friends intimated, as a means of exhumorating him, that he had more serious matters to consider. This was partially true, for as the year of 1813 came to a close, rumors of an invasion of Louisiana by the British were causing great excitement; and the simultaneous uprising of the Indians in Alabama did not tend to diminish his anxiety. Therefore as a means of preparing for eventualities, he was busy trying to collect military supplies and men for the defense of the state.<sup>11</sup> Hence, he had no time to dislodge the Baratarians, or to prevent their holding auctions and smuggling in contraband.<sup>12</sup>

On January 20, 1814, Governor Claiborne was informed by a United States Collector of Revenue that the Lafittes were planning another public sale. Approximately 415 negroes were advertised for sale on January 24th at "The Temple" near Barataria.<sup>13</sup> The Collector of Revenue requested that a strong force be organized and sent to "The Temple" to prevent the sale. It is evident that the customs official did not get a large force, for only twelve men were supplied for this mission. As instructed, they proceeded thither a few days early in order to be prepared to stop the sale. However, before the date of

---

<sup>11</sup>

Gayarre, op. cit., IV, 306, 307.

<sup>12</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>

Ibid., IV, 312.

the auction, Jean Lafitte and his men attacked the custom officer's force, killing one, wounding two, and taking the rest prisoners. Consequently the sale was held and every negro was sold. When the inspector received the news of the circumstances of the event, Governor Claiborne was duly apprised and asked for a force large enough to punish<sup>14</sup> the Baratarians. But since the Governor did not have such a force to give to the custom's officer, the latter's letters, accompanied by one of his own, was sent to the State Legislature. In his own letter, the Governor made a request for men and money, and added that if the Baratarians were to be routed the State of Louisiana would have to do it, for the general, who was in command of the federal troops, found it inconvenient at that time to supply any of his few regulars. Criticism was likewise presented to the legislature on the conduct and the disobedience of the militia, in "The Temple" affair. Claiborne's criticism leads one to believe that the militia had been bought off:

My present powers are doubtless competent to the ordering of a detachment of militia on this service, but I owe it to myself and to the State to guard against even the probability of a miscarriage. For it would be indeed a melancholy occurrence, if the men detailed for this duty, encouraged to disobedience by the late conduct of some militia corps, should furnish evidence of the inability of the Executive to enforce, on this occasion, the supremacy of the laws. I, therefore, recommend this subject to your immediate consideration.<sup>15</sup>

When the assembly received this message they listened

---

<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.; Fortier, op. cit., III, 88.

<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Gayarre, op. cit., IV, 313.

while it was read, and later appointed a committee to confer with the Governor. Nothing ever came of this action except<sup>16</sup> its making the brothers more defiant. In the meantime, Jean Lafitte with the "utmost unconcern" chose Donaldsonville, a small town situated at the Junction of the Bayou La Fourche and the Mississippi River, as a new market center to which he dispatched daily consignments under armed guards. These guards defied "all" interference with the trade. Jean's<sup>17</sup> confidence seems to have been "well founded." The lack<sup>18</sup> of funds in the state treasury, he reasoned, would postpone, which it did, to a more opportune time, the organization of a military force so often solicited by Governor Claiborne.<sup>19</sup>

From the opening events of the war in the Southwest, economic conditions continued to become more galling and irritating to local merchants. This condition, greatly aggravated by the Lafittes, soon indicated that legitimate business would be reined if a solution were not provided.

---

<sup>16</sup> Gayarre, op. cit., IV, 313, 314.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., IV, 314.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Some authors are not very lenient in their criticism of Governor Claiborne and other officials for permitting the Baratarians to exist. Latour, a military man, says that the governmental officials had the means for putting a stop to this trade, and that a well directed expedition against Barataria would have wiped them out. He laments the weak attempts made by the officials against the smugglers, Latour, op. cit., p. 16.

Commerce from Vera Cruz and other neutral ports was gradually diverted from New Orleans because the pirates had terrorized and undersold the merchantmen who were engaged in trade in this region. Consequently bank deposits decreased, local stocks slumped, and foreclosures increased until the situation became alarming. And well it should have, for with the British victories in the North and the Northeast, many of our ports were occupied, making it appear likely that these "law defying" desperadoes would soon have Louisiana<sup>20</sup> at their mercy.

On March 2, 1814, Governor Claiborne wrote another letter to the Legislature of Louisiana. He explained the serious effect that the illegal traffic was having upon Louisiana, and asked permission to raise troops to be<sup>21</sup> employed in the destruction of the Baratarians. To his fervent plea they did nothing because they were now unfriendly with the chief executive over a controversy concerning the appointment of a judge.<sup>22</sup>

Again thwarted in his desperate attempt to raise troops to destroy the Baratarians, he decided to try strategy. As a preliminary step, a friendly jury of American merchants and bankers was called. As a precaution the jury met in secret to prevent the intimidation

---

<sup>20</sup>

Gayarre, op. cit., IV, 314, 315.

<sup>21</sup>

Ibid., IV, 316; Fortier, op. cit., III, 88.

<sup>22</sup>

Fortier, op. cit., III, 88; Gayarre, op. cit., IV, 316.

of witnesses. A long line of witnesses, accordingly, filed through the court and swore to many acts of piracy by the Lafittes. Indictments, therefore, were found against both of the Lafittes. Immediately a force of policemen was sent out to search the places frequented by the Baratarians. They were successful in their search, for they caught Pierre Lafitte, Dominique You, and some of the other Baratarians<sup>23</sup> off their guard, and imprisoned them in the Cabildo.

When Jean Lafitte heard of the plight of his brother, he hurried to New Orleans. But this time he came secretly. He tried to get Pierre released from jail through lavish bribes and persuasive pleas. But all overtures, including<sup>24</sup> bail, were denied. This action did not deter Jean from further purpose. Good lawyers were needed, and he had the money to pay them to secure his brother's release and to clear the charges against both of them. After a conference with the District Attorney, John R. Grimes, the lawyer, he<sup>25</sup> resigned his office to defend the brother. Robert R. Livingston, who was later a member of President Jackson's Cabinet and minister to France, was retained to assist in the trial. It is said that each of these lawyers was

---

<sup>23</sup>

Fortier, op. cit., III, 90.

<sup>24</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., pp. 112, 113.

<sup>25</sup>

E. P. Michell, "A Romance of American History, The Story of Lafitte the Pirate of Genius and the Baratarians," The Sun, (New York City), June 25, 1893; DeBow's Review, XII, 222.

promised \$20,000 for his services.

The lawyers, influential and scholarly, were unable to get Pierre released from jail.<sup>27</sup> He remained there most of the summer. Meanwhile, Jean did not appear in public in New Orleans. He remained in seclusion, but otherwise carried on his business as usual, leaving the defense of his brother and himself in the hands of his attorneys. Governmental authorities, anxious as they were to bring the Baratarians to trial, momentarily gave up their search of Jean and others, and began to prepare for the defense of Louisiana, for an invasion by the British appeared inevitable.

On September 2, 1814, the Baratarians were startled by a cannon shot which had been fired at one of their vessels. They did not know whether they were being attacked or not, for they saw a ship of war standing at the entrance to their harbor. In order to determine the meaning of this Jean Lafitte, with four men, got into a boat and rowed out toward the intruder. They were met by a boat flying a flag of truce and, in addition, a British flag. The occupants of the boat were British officers who inquired as to the whereabouts of Mr. Lafitte. They had, they said, an important packet to deliver to him. Jean asked the officers to accompany him, and he would lead them to the famous gentleman. The officers accepted the offer, but

---

<sup>26</sup>

Michell, loc. cit., Arthur, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>27</sup>

Arthur, op. cit., p. 41.

Jean did not disclose his identity until both boats were ashore. When he made known his identity, the packet was placed in his hands. About 200 of Lafitte's men who had been watching events were lined up along the shore, when the boats arrived at the beach. Thinking that these officers were spies seeking a passage to invade Louisiana, Lafitte's henchmen wished to make prisoners of them. Jean was able, however, to prevent his guests from being molested<sup>28</sup> until they were taken safely to his dwelling.

After making his visitors comfortable, Jean opened the parcel. In it he found four separate manuscripts. The first manuscript opened was a rather ambiguously worded proclamation which was addressed to the residents of Louisiana and Kentucky by Colonel Edward Nichols, the commandant of the British army at Pensacola. This document requested the residents of these regions to send supplies to the British, whose army was supposedly helping these citizens in their fight against the "faithless, imbecile"<sup>29</sup> American government. The second letter in the packet was addressed to the piratical leader. It had been sent by Colonel Edward Nichols, who requested that Jean place his ships at the disposal of Great Britain. As an inducement for services that he might render, the British government offered him a captaincy in the British navy, as well

<sup>28</sup>

Fortier, op. cit., III, 90, 91; Latour, op. cit., pp. 17, 18.

<sup>29</sup>

Latour, op. cit., app., pp. vii, viii; Niles Weekly Register, (Baltimore), 1814, VII, 134.

OKLAHOMA  
AGRICULTURE & MECHANICAL COLLEGE  
LIBRARY  
JUL 17 1937

30

as land for himself and his men. The third letter was written by the senior officer and captain, William H. Percy. It was addressed to Officer Lockyear and commanded him to proceed to Barataria and endeavor to prevent the Baratarians from preying upon Spanish commerce; Spain being then at peace with England. Lockyear was also directed to enlist the Baratarians for aid in the capture of Mobile. This letter was evidently given to Jean to show the authority by which Captain Lockyear acted.<sup>31</sup> The last letter in the packet had the same author and addressee as its predecessor. In it the British threatened to destroy the Baratarians for preying upon the British commerce. If they sent aid and accepted the British offer,<sup>32</sup> they would not be disturbed.

Jean read the letters over carefully, and seemingly considered the British proposals. After he had finished reading them, Captain Lockyear urged him to join the British and supplemented all other inducements by an offer of \$30,000 for the services of the Baratarians. Undoubtedly the British officials wanted not only tangible help, but expert knowledge on the topographical conditions

30

Niles Weekly Register, VII, 134; Latour, op. cit., app. p. ix.

31

Latour, op. cit., p. 19.

32

Ibid.

of the land through which they were going to move.<sup>33</sup> After this very generous proposal, Jean asked for time to think the proposition over, and begged for a leave of absence. Unaware of the motive that prompted the request, the concession was granted. Immediately after Jean had gone, the officers apparently under Jean's orders, were seized and placed under a guard. In this condition, they remained until they were released, with apologies, on the following morning. From the tenor of the apologies, Jean attempted to convey the idea to his guests that they had been apprehended and held without his orders.<sup>34</sup>

Upon the departure of the officers from the island, a special messenger was sent with the British epistles to John Blaque, a member of the Louisiana legislature. At the same time Governor Claiborne was appealed to for instructions concerning the British affair and for relief for Pierre who was still in jail.<sup>35</sup>

Of course Jean had no intention of joining the British, but he did wish to leave a favorable impression with them in order to gain some time to communicate and receive instructions on what course to pursue under such critical

<sup>33</sup>

The Times Picayune (New Orleans), January 8, 1928; (Article written by Fred Cambus who had access to the E. A. Parson collection.); Latour, op. cit., p. 19; Frontier, op. cit., III, 91.

<sup>34</sup>

Fortier, op. cit., III, 91.

<sup>35</sup>

Latour, op. cit., pp. 21, 22; Niles Weekly Register, VII, 167.

circumstances.<sup>36</sup> For this reason he sent a rather evasive letter to Captain Lockyear, in which he asked for fourteen days in which to consider the proposition and to wind up his business.<sup>37</sup> Lockyear seemed satisfied and sailed away for the time.<sup>38</sup>

When Mr. Blanque received the letters, he immediately laid them before Governor Claiborne, who summoned his advisers, General Villers, Commodore Patterson, and Colonel Ross, to see what should be done. The Governor asked two questions: first, were the letters genuine? and, second, should the Governor hold intercourse with Lafitte? Both questions were answered in the negative, and Jean's messenger returned to him without a written reply.<sup>39</sup> Commodore Patterson and Colonel Ross, instead of cooperating with the patriotic Frenchman wished to chastise him, for at this time there was an adequate number of vessels in New Orleans to do the act.

In early September while this correspondence was being carried on, Pierre Lafitte either managed, or was permitted, to escape from jail.<sup>40</sup> There is no doubt, however, that he escaped at this time, for on September 7th, the jailer of

---

<sup>36</sup>

Latour, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>37</sup>

Ibid., app., p. xi.

<sup>38</sup>

Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>39</sup>

Ibid., p. 22; Martin, op. cit., pp. 362, 363; Fortier, op. cit., III, 94, 95.

<sup>40</sup>

Fortier, op. cit., III, 94.

the parish prison offered, perhaps for the sake of appearances,<sup>41</sup> a reward of \$1,000 for the capture of the famous pirate, who it seems was so well known that a detailed<sup>42</sup> description of him was unnecessary.

Since Jean Lafitte had received no word from the American authorities, he became worried. He knew the British officers would soon return for an answer. On<sup>43</sup> September 7th, he wrote another letter to Mr. Blanque,<sup>44</sup> and still another on September 10th in which the official was urged to send instructions. Pierre also wrote to<sup>45</sup> Mr. Blanque and to Governor Claiborne in the same tone, but no instructions came, and the British, who had returned as they had planned, became tired of waiting and sailed<sup>46</sup> away.

About this time, Jean received the information that the American government was planning to attack Barataria instead of accepting his services, so he spread the news among the inhabitants. While he was out warning them of<sup>47</sup> the danger, an anonymous letter fell into his hands. This letter contained valuable information concerning the British plan of warfare, and he patriotically sent it to

<sup>41</sup> Louisiana Courier, (New Orleans), September 7, 1814.

<sup>42</sup> Story of Jean and Pierre, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> Latour, op. cit., app. p. xiii.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., app. p. xiv.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., app. p. xv.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> Fortier, op. cit., III, 94; Latour, op. cit., p. 23.

the authorities in Louisiana.<sup>48</sup> But this patriotic act seemed only to hasten Commodore Patterson and Colonel Ross<sup>49</sup> on their steps to attack Barataria.

On September 11th, Commodore Patterson had assembled three barges loaded with men and munitions. These were floated down the Mississippi River to Balze, a small village near the mouth of the river. According to plans, Colonel Ross with six gunboats and the schooner Carolina joined them at this place. From here, they sailed together along<sup>50</sup> the gulf toward Barataria.

On September 16, 1814, the Baratarians saw a fleet approaching their shores. They lined their ships up for battle, for they thought the British had returned to destroy them. When the Baratarians perceived that the approaching fleet belonged to the American government, they set fire to two of their ships, and most of them, including the Lafitte brothers, attempted escape and succeeded in escaping into the swamps. The Baratarians had no desire to fight the Americans. This fact explains the success of the American expedition which took possession of remaining ships, burned the village, and conveyed the spoils from<sup>51</sup> the warehouse to New Orleans.

---

<sup>48</sup>

Latour, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>49</sup>

Arthur, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>50</sup>

Niles Weekly Register, VII, 166, 167.

<sup>51</sup>

Ibid.

It is interesting to note the force and the value of the Lafitte establishment at the time of its destruction. Commodore Patterson reported that there were from 800 to 1000 men in Barataria at that time, twenty cannon, large stocks of munitions, and small arms, and thirteen vessels, (after several were burned and others were elsewhere on duty) six of which were schooners. The haul was later appraised at \$500,000.<sup>52</sup>

For a time after September 16, 1814, the sun did not shine so brightly upon the Lafitte brothers. They were both free, but they had to travel cautiously. They had suffered a serious loss in the destruction of Barataria. Their men, except those who were in jail, were scattered. Their property and ships had been carried away. The American authorities had spurned their offer to defend the United States. Jackson had called them "hellish bandits,"<sup>53</sup> and many people in New Orleans were convinced that the brothers were really pirates, for in the spoils that were captured at Barataria some clothing and jewelry were found that had belonged to a Creole lady who had disappeared out at sea.<sup>54</sup> Even many of their former friends refused to defend them any longer.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>53</sup>

Fortier, op. cit., III, 98; Alexander Walker, Jackson and New Orleans, New York, 1856, p. 53.

<sup>54</sup>

Arthur, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>55</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., p. 159.

But the Lafitte brothers did not give up. They held secret conferences with lawyer Grimes and Robert Livingston. (Livingston, about this time, became Jackson's personal secretary.) Their counsel advised them to wait for a while, for the time was inopportune for them to attempt to clear themselves. Louisiana was facing an invasion and there was no time for civil procedures. For the brothers the delay was a blessing, since it gave them a chance to repair their organization. Those of the Lafitte establishment, who had managed to escape on September 16th, gradually moved from their hide-outs to Lost Island.<sup>56</sup> No longer could they go to Grand Terre, for a force of American troops under direction of Governor Claiborne were stationed there.<sup>57</sup> Jean kept in touch with all his men, those in jail by his attorneys, those at large by fortuitous means. So efficient was he in this matter that his influences never waned.<sup>58</sup>

While the Lafittes were having their troubles, Louisiana was in a state of intense excitement over the weakness of her fortifications, her military forces, and the impending invasion. At this time the military force in New Orleans consisted of 700 American troops and 1000 militia,<sup>59</sup> augmented by six gunboats, one sloop, and 150 marines and sailors to defend the long shore line.<sup>60</sup> Competent and

---

<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Saxon, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>57</sup> Rowland, op. cit., VI, 297.

<sup>58</sup> Saxon, op. cit., pp. 163, 164.

<sup>59</sup> Martin, op. cit., p. 366.

<sup>60</sup> Gayarre, op. cit., IV, 384, 385.

efficient as this equipment was, its efforts were violated<sup>61</sup> by a shortage of arms, especially of rifles, flints, munitions, and other necessary supplies. What could be done under the circumstance with the British over 12,000 strong at the very door of Louisiana and no reserves or supplies<sup>62</sup> within hundreds of miles?

The military weakness of Louisiana was a boon to the Baratarians. Louisiana needed men and supplies; the Lafittes and their men needed relief from the law. Lafitte wanted to strike a bargain. With this in mind Robert Livingston wrote to President Madison on October 25th, recommending that the Baratarians be pardoned. He argued that it would be for the good of Louisiana, for if they were pardoned, the military forces in Louisiana would be increased by<sup>63</sup> five hundred men. Governor Claiborne seems to have been influenced by the same idea, for he declared on October 3rd, that he would not be opposed to leniency toward some of<sup>64</sup> the less influential offenders of the law.

Upon the arrival of General Jackson in New Orleans on December 2, 1814, Robert Livingston, the "social leader" of

<sup>61</sup>

Correspondante of Andrew Jackson, John Spencer Bassett, ed., Baltimore, 1927, III, 339, 347; Ibid., II, 174, 110; The Times Picayune, January 8, 1928. (Article by Fred Cambus).

<sup>62</sup>

Rowland, op. cit., VI, 290; Saxon, op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>63</sup>

Edward Livingston (New Orleans) to President James Madison, October 24, 1814, (Photostatic copy, Rosenberg Library, Galveston).

<sup>64</sup>

Rowland, op. cit., VI, 302.

the metropolis, the best scholar in all Louisiana and the friend and the attorney of Jean Lafitte, was further honored by being invited to serve as his military secretary. Unusually anxious to inspect his new assignment, Jackson began an inspection of the men and munitions. Much to his disappointment, but not to his surprise, he found among other things a serious lack of munitions and gun flints, and<sup>65</sup> Washington was notified accordingly.

Jean Lafitte learned through Livingston, or through some other source, of the scarcity of flints and munitions. In some respects such news was a godsend, for this gave him another opportunity to prove to the Colonial and the federal authorities his devotion to their cause. Well did he know that in one of his secret rendezvous there<sup>66</sup> were stored supplies that would be most welcome, and their delivery might serve as a pallium to assuage the feelings of his prosecutors. General Jackson in person therefore, was approached with his patriotic offer, and<sup>67</sup> it was speedily accepted. As a result, approximately 7,500 pistol flints and other needed materials were supplied. These flints and supplies went into the guns of the Americans whose weapons would otherwise have been<sup>68</sup> worthless.

---

<sup>65</sup> Saxon, op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>66</sup> Bassett, op. cit., II, 114.

<sup>67</sup> Gayarre, op. cit., IV, 410, 411.

<sup>68</sup> Bassett, op. cit., II, 339, 347.

Jackson's appreciation for the good deed bore fruit on December 17, 1814, when Governor Claiborne issued a proclamation to the "Baratarians" in which they were invited to join the United States government in the impending fight against the British. If the offer were accepted a recommendation carrying the support of the governor and his staff would be sent to the President asking for a full pardon for them.<sup>69</sup> The Baratarians in toto, grasped at the proposition, for it was fair, yes, more than fair. Those who were in jail were released to join their associates, and ere long a motley group found themselves in the army service.

On December 23rd, the eve of the first battle with the British, Jean was sent with a strong force to guard against an attack from the gulf.<sup>70</sup> This task was done so speedily that he turned his divisions over to his subordinates and returned to bolster the courage of Jackson's small army in repelling the invasion.<sup>71</sup>

When it appeared onimous that the British forces under General Packenham were determined to occupy the district of New Orleans, we find the brothers serving first as topographers, then as engineers, messengers, etc.,<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup>

Rowland, op. cit., VI, 324.

<sup>70</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., pp. 183-185; Joseph Edgar Chamberlin, The Ifs in History, Philadelphia, 1907, p. 133.

<sup>71</sup>

De Bow's Review, XIII, 204, 205.

<sup>72</sup>

Bassett, op. cit., II, 29, 125, 132; Arthur, op. cit., p. 41; Walker, op. cit., pp. 57-59; Chamberlin, op. cit., p. 133.

while their subjects were divided into companies and scattered along the firing line. There they fought courageously, shoulder to shoulder with their "patrons" and persecutors, against one of the best trained armies of Europe; an army that was better equipped, more experienced, and larger--three times the size of Jackson's forces. Yes, an army that had tasted of the glory of victory that came with the humiliation of Napoleon and one thoroughly steeped with the ideals of Lord Wellington, General Packenham's brother-in-law. Yet this army, in its turn, suffered defeat by the hands of a small conglomerate mass of individuals under the direction of a backwoodsman. To make it even more disgraceful to the highly touted invaders, men, who sailed under the flag of the skull and crossbones, made their downfall possible by outshooting their best artillerymen.

73

It is interesting to speculate on what might have happened had the Lafittes joined the British with their ships and men. First, the British probably could have captured New Orleans, for they could have cut off American reinforcements from the north by using Lafitte's small boats and his knowledge of the water passages. Second, the American commander would not have had even the passive, let alone the active, support of the French

73

Chamberlin, op. cit., pp. 133, 134; Arthur, op. cit., p. 41.

74

Walker, op. cit., p. 58, 59; Chamberlin, op. cit., p. 134.

population in Louisiana, nor would they have had flints,  
 and other supplies for their guns.<sup>75</sup> Third, in the battle  
 of December 23rd, Jackson would have had scarcely more  
 than 1500 men to face the 12,000 British. Louisiana would  
 probably have been overrun and Jackson, the hero of many  
 another battle, would have been swept aside, and the honor  
 and prestige that came with the decisive engagement non  
 existent. Likewise, the West would have lost the future  
 services of one of its most unusual characters, for a  
 decision other than the one delivered could have thwarted  
 the wave of popularity already on the rise which led to  
 his being elected President.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup>

Bassett, op. cit., III, 339.

<sup>76</sup>

Story of Jean and Pierre, op. cit., p. 25-28.

## Chapter III

## The Lafittes, After New Orleans

The Lafittes had undoubtedly rendered a valuable service to the United States government during the British engagements on the lower Mississippi. This service apparently was, at the time, appreciated by the French creoles and most of the Americans in this region. By some they were even considered heroes. Consequently, public opinion was, for a short time, favorable to them. Instead of being prosecuted by officials, these men were now invited to attend public gatherings with other prominent citizens, where they basked in the romance, fame, and glamor that had been attached to their names.<sup>1</sup>

On January 23, 1815, New Orleans celebrated the late victory. With this celebration, a public ball was held and all the notables, including the Lafittes, were present, and they mingled with military officers, soldiers, and prominent civilians, of Louisiana. Sometime during the demonstration, Jean was seen talking and laughing with his old foe, Governor Claiborne. Presumably the past was forgotten, if not forgiven, because the Governor took delight in introducing him, the former outlaw, to General Coffee. Upon hearing the name of the famous privateer, the general hesitated a moment, apparently trying to

---

<sup>1</sup>

The Story of Jean and Pierre, op. cit., p. 17.

recall where he had heard it before. Jean, who always disliked the word pirate associated with his name, took the hesitant manner of the general as an insult, stepped forward, and said, "Lafitte the pirate." General Coffee apologized for the breach of etiquette, and the two men shook hands in a friendly manner.<sup>2</sup>

The federal authorities were not long in recognizing the good work of the Lafittes and the Baratarians. It was almost impossible for them to decline to do so,<sup>3</sup> since the Louisiana Legislature, its commanding general,<sup>4</sup> and the attorneys of the Lafittes early brought formidable pressure to bear upon the authorities in Washington. Their efforts bore fruit on February 6, 1815, when President Madison issued a proclamation granting a full pardon to all offenders of the revenue laws who had fought against the British in the late war. He also directed that all suits, fines, penalties, and forfeitures, against those who were eligible for pardon, be "discontinued" and "released."<sup>5</sup>

The brothers thus regained their citizenship, but, contrary to the President's orders, the property that had been taken in the raid on Barataria, was not restored to

---

<sup>2</sup> DeBow's Review, 1852, XIII, 204, 205; King, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> Rowland, op. cit., VI, 338.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Livingston, New Orleans, Livingston to President James Madison, October 24, 1814. (Photostatic copy, Rosenberg Library, Galveston).

<sup>5</sup> Richardson, op. cit., I, 558, 559.

them. As a result, Jean, in an attempt to recover the property, filed suit in the District Court of Louisiana. The possessors of the property, however, did not intend for it to slip from them without a struggle, and, being quick to act, they sold the booty at auction, as prizes of war before the case found its way into court.<sup>6</sup> This unwarranted action made it necessary for Jean to sue the United States government for restitution.<sup>7</sup> While his claims were just, and his efforts noble, the courts were biased, and the President was passive.<sup>8</sup> Property, therefore, of inestimable value was never restored.

Even though Jean suffered severe financial reverses through the action of Patterson and Ross, ready money was easily obtained. This fact might be explained by disclosing that he had cached approximately \$200,000 worth of booty in a French settlement north of New Orleans before the raid on Barataria.<sup>9</sup> This property, apparently, had remained untouched by the American officials. The owner evidently turned it into cash, for he soon was able to repossess his ships<sup>10</sup> and to live in "high society"

---

<sup>6</sup> Saxon, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 198, 206.

<sup>8</sup> Jean wrote a personal letter to the president concerning his property but it apparently was never answered. Jean Lafitte, New Orleans, Lafitte to President Madison, December 15, 1815, (Photostatic copy of original, Rosenberg Library, Galveston).

<sup>9</sup> Bassett, op. cit., II, 114.

<sup>10</sup> Castellanos, op. cit., p. 307.

as a respectable citizen. On one occasion, it is said that this famous character spent \$60,000 on lavish entertainment in Washington.<sup>11</sup>

But Jean did not long remain in such fortunate circumstances. New Orleans had become more Americanized, and upon his returning to his old environment, an altogether different attitude was manifested toward him. Public opinion had changed. The local residents had apparently forgotten his late meritorious services, but they continued to remember stories of piracy that were connected with his name. They wondered how the money was obtained that he spent so profusely. Could he have resumed his old habits? Why had he repossessed his ships? Surely, thought they, he was up to his old tricks. His former henchmen, it was known, had once again fallen to the "lure" of the sea.<sup>12</sup> Could he be their silent leader? As a result of the quandary, American authorities in general and Beverly Chew in particular, looked upon him with well founded suspicion. All these things tended to make the former privateer so uncomfortable that he resolved to establish another kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

The governmental authorities, meanwhile, were keeping a constant vigil upon Barataria. Its intentions were so

---

<sup>11</sup>

The Story of Jean and Pierre, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>12</sup>

Ibid.; Rowland, op. cit., VI, 355.

<sup>13</sup>

Castellanos, op. cit., p. 307.

patent that Jean was wise enough to see that it was unsafe to found another domain in that area. He did not, however, give up the idea of using the various water passages, frequented during his heydays or the market of New Orleans. All that was needed, he reasoned, was a new base of operations, beyond the jurisdiction of the United States. Accordingly, the two brothers with many of their former followers, including Dominique You, left New Orleans for Port au Prince.<sup>14</sup> Upon their arrival at that place, and contrary to their expectations, a welcome did not await them; since news of their bad reputations and recent maritime autrocities had preceeded them. The insular authorities, therefore, allowed the fleet to dock only long enough to take on supplies. They were then forced<sup>15</sup> to leave.

Disappointed and discouraged by this recent adventure, Jean found it necessary to return to inhospitable New Orleans. Apparently his conceited manner and strong confidence now suffered a severe jolt, for, in addition to all other troubles, many of his men deserted and the services of his most trusted lieutenant, Dominique You, were terminated. Jean, however, did not remain inactive or long despondent for soon some sort of relationship was formed with the free booters of Galveston. After a

---

<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.; Fortier, op. cit., III, 169.

<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.; Fortier, op. cit., III, 169.

visit with them in the spring of 1817, agreements were consummated by which the brothers acted as salesmen for some of these corsairs. Merchandise was taken from them at Galveston Island, and conveyed by boat to New Orleans where it was sold to their former patrons. These actions soon provoked the wrath of Beverly Chew who made repeated complaints to the Secretary of the Treasury and other officials.<sup>16</sup>

Evidently their business was poor, and their profits limited, for about this time (1817), Jean became a spy in the pay of the Spanish government.<sup>17</sup> Almost simultaneously another opportunity knocked at the brothers' door. Louis d'Aury, the leader of the Spanish revolutionists who commanded the little settlement then at Galveston, deserted the island for a time.<sup>18</sup> This action made it possible for Jean to acquire a new rendezvous and at the same time gain a vantage point where the movements of the Spanish revolutionists could be observed. Though he had no intention of aiding the Texas patriots, their leader, General Long, d'Aurys colleague, was accosted and convinced of his interest in the cause for Texas Independence. After a

<sup>16</sup>

Niles Weekly Register, 1817, 228, 289, 293; American State Papers of Foreign Relation, Walter Lowrie and Walter S. Franklin, eds., Washington, 1834, IV, 134; State Papers and Public Documents of the United States, XI, 347-361, (Photostatic copy, Rosenberg Library, Galveston).

<sup>17</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>18</sup>

James Campbell, MS, Information derived from James Campbell now residing on Galveston Bay, June 10, 1855, (Rosenberg Library, Galveston).

"nondescript" ceremony was performed by them and their followers they declared allegiance to the newly formed Mexican Republic. Then they, in turn, formed a provisional government at Galveston and appointed themselves as its  
<sup>19</sup> officials.

By this unusual turn of affairs, Jean apparently was encouraged and invigorated. Repairing to New Orleans, new crews were organized, munitions and supplies were  
<sup>20</sup> purchased, and upon leaving that city he peddled approximately 355 slaves to the planters right before the very  
<sup>21</sup> eyes of Beverly Chew.

He then returned to Galveston, took possession of the island, constructed fortifications, and began to  
<sup>22</sup> effect a permanent settlement. To this settlement he gave the name of Campeachy.

The little colony, was not so different from other frontier settlements in that it had Indian troubles. The Carancahuas, a tribe that roamed near the little settlement, often visited and made petty raids upon its citizens. These acts were tolerated and the two parties remained on friendly terms for a time. Eventually a hunting party from the little village stole an Indian woman when on one of

---

<sup>19</sup> State Papers, XI, 347; Niles Weekly Register, XIII, 289; Castellanos, op. cit., p. 307, 308; Fortier, op. cit., III, 169.

<sup>20</sup> State Papers, XI, 354, 355.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

its expeditions. A serious conflict resulted. The Indians made an attack on the village and before they were driven away inflicted severe damage. Further trouble, however, was prevented by Jean, who after organizing some two hundred men, pursued and caught the natives. A fight ensued and<sup>23</sup> thirty or forty of the Indians were killed.

About this time, Jean was able to obtain a commission from the Mexican Republic which supposedly placed his<sup>24</sup> activities upon a legal foundation. His fleet was soon bringing in many rich prizes; consequently, prosperity smiled upon him once more. News of these events presently reached his old followers. They, upon hearing the good tidings, flocked, with others of their sort, to his side. In order to insure local tranquillity these desperate individuals were wisely permitted to revive a communal<sup>25</sup> form of government which had previously been organized. Coming in such large numbers, these individuals soon increased the population of the island to approximately<sup>26</sup> 1000. Saloons, amusement and boarding houses sprang up around the two story brick house that Jean had built for himself. All the residents were contented with such freedom and well-being. The United States and Spanish

---

<sup>23</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>24</sup>

Yoakum, op. cit., I, 194.

<sup>25</sup>

Notice signed by Jean Lafitte on Galveston Island, May 5, 1818, MS, (Dyer Collection, Rosenberg Library, Galveston).

<sup>26</sup>

Fortier, op. cit., III, 169; Yoakum, op. cit., I, 194.

governments, permitted them to exist and continue their desperate acts, since that territory was claimed by both governments. Spain, though she did not care to have the pirates protected, objected to the extension of the jurisdiction of the American government over them. Fear was expressed that if it were done the United States government would keep the territory.<sup>27</sup>

Jean's methods, at this time, of turning the spoils into cash were quite similar to those formerly employed at Barataria.<sup>28</sup> Apparently a sales force was organized to smuggle the goods into Louisiana. The famous Bowie brothers, Jim and Rezin, as agents, made enormous profits in selling Africans and other merchandise to Louisiana slave companies. These companies, in turn, bribed the customs officers in order to validate the title to the property acquired by the planters.<sup>29</sup>

Campeachy reached the zenith of its prosperity about a year after it was first established. At this time (1818) prizes were so plentiful that negroes sold for "a dollar a pound,"<sup>30</sup> yet so great was the volume of trade that profits

<sup>27</sup> Fortier, op. cit., III, 169; Yoakum, op. cit., I, 195.

<sup>28</sup> State Papers, XI, 355, 366; Campbell, loc. cit., MS.

<sup>29</sup> William Bollert, "Life of Jean Lafitte, the Pirate of the Mexican Gulf," Galveston Daily News, (Galveston), July 6, 1930, (Reprinted from Littell's Living Age, March 1852 and originally from the United Service Magazine, October and November, 1851); DeBow's Review, 1851, XI, 381; Eugene C. Barker, "The African Slave Trade in Texas," The Quarterly of the Texas Historical Society, (Austin), 1902, VI, 148, 149.

<sup>30</sup> Martin, op. cit., p. 362.

31  
 were bountiful. Planters came from New Orleans to the island to make their purchases from the pirates who were living in luxury with their mistresses and wine.

In the summer of 1818, a catastrophe, however, befell the inhabitants of Campeachy. A severe tropical storm struck the island and sent water rushing over its low lying land. All the houses were destroyed, fourteen ships were wrecked, and hundreds of men lost their lives. Jean suffered a tremendous personal loss,<sup>32</sup> but he still retained his indomitable courage. With the remaining inhabitants under his direction, the island was cleared of wreckage, the dead were buried and new habitats were built. After this work had been finished, another serious problem faced them. How were they to live through the winter without money or provisions? Jean, alert on every occasion, relieved the situation by taking to New Orleans the negro mistresses where they were sold as slaves. The money received from this sale, augmented by funds which he borrowed, permitted him to purchase the needed provisions. They were conveyed<sup>33</sup> to the destitute inhabitants at Galveston.

Not long after this disaster Jean made one of his few piratical voyages. On this occasion he left Galveston Island with three ships and sailed south toward Yucatan.

---

31  
 Martin, op. cit., p. 362.

32  
DeBow's Review, XI, 385.

33  
 Saxon, op. cit., pp. 221-223; DeBow's Review, XI, 385.

A few unimportant captures were made in this area, and then the prows of the vessels were pointed toward Cuba, but no prey was to be found. Finally, after becoming discouraged from long waiting, a fleet of ten Spanish merchantmen was sighted. The prospect looked promising to a few of the men. Their hopes, however, were blasted when in a meeting Jean informed them that his commission had expired and that all of them would be considered pirates should they attack the vessels. Consequently, a few men of the better class, who were already downhearted, demanded a vessel in which to go home. Necessity compelled Jean to comply with their demands. He stripped one of his ships of its artillery and gave the vessel to them. These dissenters sailed to New Orleans and made a report of the incident to the customs officials.<sup>34</sup>

Soon after Jean returned from this cruise to Galveston, he was accosted by Colonel George Graham. This officer had been sent by the authorities in Washington to investigate the repeated violation of federal laws and to see that Galveston was evacuated. After visiting the settlement for a short time and being courteously entertained, he informed Jean that the island must be deserted. Jean, protested his innocence, and although he did not set a date, politely told the officer that if it were the wishes of the authorities in Washington, the order would be gladly executed. The visitor, apparently satisfied with the promise, and

---

<sup>34</sup>Saxon, op. cit., p. 224.

not anxious to resort to coercive measures, left the settlement, while the supposed evacuation took place. But it was not abandoned, for its occupants remained and continued to conduct their business as usual.<sup>35</sup>

In October, 1819, Galveston was made a port of entry by the embryonic Texas Republic, and at the same time, Jean, through his contact with General Long, was made the Governor of Galveston.<sup>36</sup> This action, indeed, placed our character in a most delicate situation. He was guilty of double dealing--as a servant of Spain, his efforts had been cast with the Texas patriots; as the Governor of Galveston, he had violated his oaths by piratical movements; as an American citizen, he repeatedly violated his country's revenue laws; and as a protege and friend of General Long, he had repeatedly revealed his plans to the Spanish authorities.<sup>37</sup>

Due to the precautions that were now being taken by the Spanish merchantmen in arming their ships, the number of cargoes that were captured by the pirates at Galveston decreased. In turn, the residents of Campeachy who lived and prospered on this trade became discontented and unruly. Soon their leader's influence was no longer paramount. Although he repeatedly cautioned them about preying upon

---

<sup>35</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., pp. 226, 227.

<sup>36</sup>

Fortier, op. cit., III, 169.

<sup>37</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., pp. 228, 232.

American citizens, little attention was paid to his warning.<sup>38</sup>  
 After many successful encounters with Spanish merchantmen,  
 the pirates became so bold that they attacked any ship that  
 happened to come their way, regardless of its flag; they  
 even fell so low as to resort to petty larceny upon planters  
 who lived along the coast.<sup>39</sup>

On one occasion, (October, 1819), a group of these  
 degenerates stole ten negroes and other property from a  
 planter living near New Orleans.<sup>40</sup> This act caused great  
 indignation among the residents in that community. By  
 gaining publicity through the local newspapers,<sup>41</sup> the  
 wrath of the authorities was provoked and forthwith an  
 American naval vessel was sent after the offenders, then  
 on their way to Galveston. When the pursued reached the  
 island, Jean saw that he would become involved if he pro-  
 tected the fugitives. So, in order to make a show at fair  
 dealing, he caused the leader of the criminals to be hanged.  
 His accomplices were promptly apprehended and turned over  
 to an American official for punishment.<sup>43</sup>

Following this act of condign punishment, Jean sent

<sup>38</sup>

Campbell, loc. cit., MS.

<sup>39</sup>

Fortier, op. cit., p. 169; Castellanos, op. cit., p. 307;  
 William Kennedy, Texas, London, 1841, p. 289.

<sup>40</sup>

Louisiana Courier, October 15, 1819.

<sup>41</sup>

Louisiana Courier, October 20, 1819.

<sup>42</sup>

Niles Weekly Register, 1819, XVI, 431.

<sup>43</sup>

Orleans Gazette, (New Orleans), November 20, 1819.

two of his lieutenants, Jean Desfarges and Robert Johnson, with a crew of sixteen men to New Orleans, with orders to return with a ship which was then under construction. His instructions were followed until they started homeward, then a short unscheduled cruise was made in which they managed to capture an American ship. In returning with this prize to their base of operation, they were sighted by officers of the Alabama, a United States revenue cutter. Becoming suspicious of the piratical vessel, the American officials gave chase and hauled it down. In the fight that ensued the pirates were made prisoners and taken to New Orleans in irons.<sup>44</sup>

When Jean heard of the misfortunes that had befallen his comrades he hastened to New Orleans<sup>45</sup> and engaged Lawyers Livingston and Grimes for their defense. Many of his old followers, upon seeing their former chief in distress rushed to his aid. These men through the influence of Jean and Pierre, worked up a sentiment among the rabble and a mob was formed. This group threatened to tear the jail apart and burn the city if the pirates were not released from jail. Following this threat a few fires were started which aroused the fury of the citizenry. Accordingly, the state militia was called out

---

<sup>44</sup>

DeBow's Review, XI, 385, 386.

<sup>45</sup>

Ibid.

to quell the disturbance.

Regardless of this demonstration and the pleas of the able attorneys, the offenders were brought before the court and convicted. Jean, however, seemed dissatisfied with the verdict and, after obtaining letters of recommendation from influential merchants and politicians, hastened to Washington with intentions of interceding for his crew. Here he managed to delay the sentence and even succeeded in gaining the freedom for one of the condemned men.<sup>47</sup> The others after repeated delays,<sup>48</sup> were hanged.

From this time on Jean's influence over his followers continued to wane;<sup>49</sup> his strength lessened, and his position at Galveston therefore became more precarious. Acts of piracy and petty thievery, often accompanied with murder, were becoming more frequent. American citizens no longer desired to tolerate such lawlessness and hoped for a respite.<sup>50</sup> The local papers at this time were full of these sentiments. Customs officials, regardless of the protests of innocence by Pierre and Jean, continued to demand aid from the federal government to prevent infractions of revenue laws. The

46

Niles Weekly Register, 1820, XVIII, 256; Castellanos, op. cit., 308, 309.

47

Castellanos, op. cit., p. 309; Saxon, op. cit., p. 246.

48

Louisiana Courier, May 26, 1820; Niles Weekly Register, 1820, XVII, 400.

49

Niles Weekly Register, 1820, XIX, 80.

50

Niles Weekly Register, 1819, XVI, 272, 400, 431; Ibid., 1819, XVII, 287, 320, 334.

Spanish governmental authorities were simultaneously making similar complaints to American officials concerning the depredation of the residents of Campeachy. For these and other reasons, the federal government was forced to take  
<sup>51</sup>  
 action.

Consequently, Lieutenant Kearney, in the Brig Enterprise, was sent early in 1821 with orders to see that Galveston island was evacuated. Upon his arrival at this island, he was met at the shore by Jean, who took him to the "red house" and entertained him in a profuse manner. Various attempts were made to divert the officer from his mission. Finally, seeing that their efforts were ineffective, the officer was informed that his orders would be obeyed. Jean asked, however, for three months time in which to settle his business affairs. To this request the officer  
<sup>52</sup>  
 reluctantly consented and quit the settlement. This time Jean saw that the federal authorities meant business. He, therefore, divided his property among some eight hundred of his men and prepared to leave the island.

Upon the expiration of the allotted time, Kearney returned and found that Jean had kept his promise--all was now in readiness for the desertion of the unique settlement. On one evening in the summer of 1821, most of the pirates, after setting fire to their structures, boarded

---

<sup>51</sup>

Saxon, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>52</sup>

Lister, op. cit., VII, 218; Campbell, op. cit., MS.

their vessels, lifted their anchors, spread their sails before the wind, and, as their ships began to disappear in the dusk, their cloudy minds, fiery tempers and husky voiced were momentarily silenced as they saw the remnant of what had once been the home of a happy settlement, disappear in smoke. Twelve years of lawlessness with all its thrills and sorrows had now come to a close. Jean and Pierre, the masters of illicit trade, the idols of the underworld, the spies of Spain, the "Saviors" of New Orleans sailed once again into the unknown sea of darkness. Their act was over, and the few remaining years of their lives were spent in recalling their past history to their roving companions.

53

53

---

Louisiana Courier, March 19, 1821. Campbell, loc. cit.  
Niles Weekly Register, 1821, XXI, 258. T. Rhodes Fischer,  
 MS., Fischer to M. B. Lamar, Matagorda, Texas, May 1, 1828.  
 (Photostatic copy in Rosenberg Library, Galveston).  
 Yoakum, op. cit., I, 204.  
 A few authentic fragments remain concerning their lives  
 after the desertion of Galveston Island.

## B I B L I O G R A P H Y

### I. Primary Material

#### A. Government

##### 1. State and Federal

- a. American State Papers of Foreign Relations. Walter Lowrie and Walter S. Franklin, eds. Washington, 1832-1861. Six vols.
- b. State Papers and Public Documents of the United States. (Photostatic copy in Rosenberg Library, Galveston). XI.

#### B. Documents, Memoirs and Letters

- a. A compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents. James D. Richardson, ed. 1897, 1909. Washington, 1909. Ten vols.
- b. Baptismal Records, MS, (Archives St. Louis Cathedral). New Orleans, 1810-1818.
- c. Campbell, James, MS. Information derived from James Campbell now residing on Galveston Bay. June 10, 1855. (Rosenberg Library, Galveston).
- d. Claiborne, W. C. C. Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne. Dunbar, Rowland, eds. New York, 1895. Six vols.
- e. Fisher, T. Rhodes, (Matagorda, Texas) to General M. B. Lamar, May 1, 1828. (Photostatic copy in Rosenberg Library, Galveston).
- f. Lafitte, Jean, (Washington) to President Madison. December 27, 1815. (Photostatic copy).
- g. Lafitte, Jean, MS, (Galveston) to James Long. June 7, 1819. (Dyer Collection in Rosenberg Library, Galveston).
- h. Latour, Major A. Lacarriere. Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana. 1814-1815. Philadelphia, 1816.

- i. Livingston, Edward, to President Madison. New Orleans, October 24, 1814. (Photostatic copy in Rosenberg Library, Galveston).
- j. Jackson, Andrew. Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. John Spencer Bassett, ed. Baltimore, 1927. Six vols.
- k. Nolte, Vincent. Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres. New York, 1854.
- l. Original Navigation order issued by the Lafitte commune on Galveston Island. April 2, 1818. Signed by Jao de la Porta. (Dyer Collection in Rosenberg Library, Galveston).
- m. Original notice dated Camp of Campeachy Isle of St. Louis. May 15, 1818. Signed by Jean Lafitte. (Dyer Collection in Rosenberg Library, Galveston).

## II. Periodicals

- A. DeBow's Review of the Southern and Western States. Baltimore, 1846-1864. Thirty four vols.
- B. Galveston Daily News. (Galveston, Texas), 1930.
- C. Louisiana Courier. (New Orleans), 1812-1822.
- D. Niles Weekly Register. (Baltimore), 1811-1849. Seventy five vols.
- E. Orleans Gazette. (New Orleans), 1814.
- F. The American Mercury. (New York), 1926. Forty vols.
- G. The Outing Magazine. (New York), 1911. 110 vols.
- H. The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Society. (Austin, Texas), 1902. Vol. VI.
- I. The Sun. (New York), 1893.
- J. The Times Picayune. (New Orleans), 1928.

## III. Secondary Material

- A. Arthur, Stanley Clisby. The Battle of New Orleans. New Orleans, 1915.

- B. Bancroft, Herbert Howe. History of the North American States and Texas. San Francisco, 1889. Thirty nine vols.
- C. Castellanos, Henry C. New Orleans as It Was. New York, 1895.
- D. Chamberlin, Joseph Edgar. The Ifs in History. Philadelphia, 1907.
- E. Fortier, Alcee. History of Louisiana. New York, 1904. Four vols.
- F. Gyarre, Charles. History of Louisiana. New Orleans, 1856. Four vols.
- G. Kennedy, William. Texas. London, 1841. Two vols.
- H. King, Grace. New Orleans, The Place and the People. New York, 1915.
- I. Martin, Frances Xavier. History of Louisiana from the Earliest Period. New Orleans, 1882.
- J. Saxon, Lyle. Lafitte the Pirate. New York, 1932.
- K. The Story of Jean and Pierre Lafitte--The Pirate Patriots. (Publication of the Louisiana State Museum. Issued by the Cabildo on Dit.) (No date).
- L. Walker, Alexander. Jackson and New Orleans. New York, 1856.
- M. Yoakum, Henderson. History of Texas. New York, 1856. Two vols.

Typed By  
Bessie Jarrell  
407 Murray Hall  
Stillwater, Oklahoma