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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

March 2019

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, March 21, 2019, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker will be Jim MacPhaille. He will give updates on his various projects in Bay St. Louis and others he has done in New Orleans. In addition he will discuss historic properties now in restoration. *Reservations are required* and may be made by calling 467-4090. **Respectfully we must request that you please call by noon on Wednesday, March 20,** to make your reservation in order to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight people and to apprise us of the number of lunches to order. Lunch is \$12.00, payable at the door, and it is catered by Almost Home Catering, Michelle Nichols, chef.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

It's time for current members to renew their memberships in the Historical Society and to encourage family and friends to join us, too. The price of membership is **\$30.00** per year. If your membership is due, your address label will read "Time to renew your membership." Please mail your renewal checks to Hancock County Historical Society, P. O. Box 3356, Bay St. Louis, MS 39521.



Because no definitively known portraits of Jean Lafitte exist, the above painting is simply a depiction of what the man and his band of pirates possibly looked like as

PIRATES, PRIVATEERS, AND PATRIOTS

By

James Keating, M.D.

The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 heralded the end of European Colonization of the Mississippi and Louisiana Gulf Coast. Meanwhile during this transitional period, there was a state of lawlessness in the surrounding hinterland of New Orleans and the Pearl River region. As a result pirates like Jean Lafitte in Louisiana and Pierre Remaux in Hancock County terrorized with impunity merchant vessels sailing the high seas along

the Spanish Main. In that era nations at war authorized their merchant fleets to arm and hunt with the intent to capture enemy merchant ships and confiscate their cargo. These pirates in Hancock County and Louisiana smuggled cargo (booty), captured African slaves aboard ship, and transported these ill-gotten gains into the Mississippi River Valley. In Waveland the famous Pirate House served as a transfer depot for slave trafficking.

Piracy is defined as the unlawful confiscation, by force if necessary, of one privately owned vessel by another party. Moreover, piracy had existed in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea for over two centuries before 1800 and had been present world-wide since prehistoric times. At the turn of the nineteenth

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Marianne Pluim, Webmaster**LOBRANO HOUSE
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“TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION.”

century it was customary for governments at war to issue “letters of marque and reprisal” which authorized qualified armed merchants to raid an enemy merchant fleet. Such owners and operators of these vessels were designated privateers or legal pirates. As an illustration, during the Revolutionary War American merchants/privateers captured many British schooners laden with arms and provisions intended to supply the British army in Boston and later New York City and elsewhere.

In this era the Napoleonic Wars involved the nations of Britain, France, and Spain. The institution of letters of marque aka privateering was thoroughly corrupted because unauthorized pirates in the Gulf of Mexico acquired or forged such documents from several countries concomitantly to justify confiscation of any vessel sailing on the high seas laden with slaves and/or cargo. Pirates would smuggle these illegal items into the markets of the Mississippi River Valley for huge profit. A smuggler is defined as a trader who deals and transports unlawful cargo into a country or territory such as textiles, slaves, arms, linen, cloth, spices, precious wools, wines, pharmaceuticals, and machinery.

To be clear, all pirates were smugglers, but not all smugglers were pirates. For example, John Hancock who inherited his uncle’s import business, was arrested on one occasion by the British authorities before the Revolutionary War. His sloop, *Liberty*, smuggled wine into the port of Boston. He is considered by most historians as a “patriotic smuggler.” In like manner George Washington did not possess a navy, but he was able to wage war on British shipping by distributing many letters of marque and reprisal. This legitimized mul-

tiple armed merchant schooners to capture British ships, effectively marshaling pirates behind an American flag who became beloved patriots.

Privateers were also known as corsairs. Privateers were considered patriotic men with legal enterprises that actually were funded publically often by syndicates of investors. According to the international rules of engagement, privateers were expected to treat politely any passengers and crew captured. The ship and the booty were supposed to be returned to the home port for confirmation and, most important, payment of duties. Nevertheless, in practice privateers in the Gulf of Mexico were smugglers/pirates who did not follow the established rules.

While Britain and France were at war, President Thomas Jefferson imposed an embargo in 1807 on all ocean-going commerce to avoid the risk of getting into war with Britain. Consequently this created an enormous business in smuggling in all parts of the United States and its territories. The country needed to export commodities such as cotton and sugar, and plantations in the South desperately needed more slave labor to expand. New Orleans was a key merchant city where such goods could be bought and sold. After the Louisiana Purchase, the federal government prohibited importation of African slaves into the Louisiana Territory. Therefore, privateers took ships with human cargo (slaves) and smuggled them into the Mississippi River Valley for the sugar and cotton plantations. Thousands of slaves on Spanish ships originally destined for Cuba, Jamaica, New Spain, and Mexico were hijacked and diverted to Louisiana through Hancock County (known then as Spanish West Florida) and the Bar-

ataria Bay. After the Louisiana Purchase, American merchants rushed to New Orleans to capitalize on this new world marketplace.

Slaving was a contract business (called *asiento*) that had been managed by the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and finally the English over the entire colonial history of North and South America. New Orleans became the major slave mart of the old southwest Gulf of Mexico. During the Spanish period of New Orleans history (1763-1803) the importation of African slaves surged. After 1803, the importation of slaves was illegal. Thus creole merchants and plantation owners were starved for slave laborers. So it was no surprise that sophisticated smuggling operations evolved in the nearby waterfront regions that would become a massive cut-rate hot goods supply chain that would bribe/influence local custom officials and judges in New Orleans.

Jean and Pierre Lafitte developed a virtual port at Grand Isle, Louisiana, called Barataria to bypass American custom officials. They operated several vessels to conduct piracy. Other independent

contractors (pirates) in the region were encouraged to deposit and sell their goods and slaves to the Lafittes who also, therefore, served as middlemen. The pirates in the Pearl River region likely unloaded cargo some of the time in Barataria. Thereby pirates could ignore revenue laws, restrictive tariffs, and other impediments to free trade. A pirate schooner might require a crew of fifty sailors. About five hundred men worked at Barataria to load, unload, and transport cargo north through the inland waterways and bayous. It was not unusual for Grand Isle to be visited on any given day by a hundred buyers looking for slaves or specific cargo. An African slave might cost two hundred dollars at Barataria but seven hundred dollars in New Orleans. American custom agents/inspectors were located in New Orleans and at La Balize (Pilotsville) at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Slaves and cargo were transported from Barataria up Bayou Lafourche to Donaldson on the Mississippi River. From there the illicit cargo would proceed north to the plantations or be smuggled south into New Orleans

in the middle of the night. Pierre Lafitte owned a warehouse on Chartres Street in the French Quarter for wholesale distribution or sale of these goods.

In the Pearl River region of Hancock County, an infamous pirate known as Pierre Remeaux, whose real name was McCullough, built a piracy/smuggling operation similar to but smaller than the one the Lafitte brothers had in Barataria. Remeaux gathered a pirate crew and outlaw band known as the "Chats-Huants" (Screech Owls) and developed a lair or Robber's Roost on Honey Island, a forgotten swampland in the middle of the Pearl River. He used the Pearl River town of Gainesville as his headquarters. Furthermore Remeaux was well educated and lived part time in a fine house in New Orleans under the pseudonym of Colonel Loring. He maintained fast ships for piracy and was known as the King of Honey Island. These pirates kept warehouses along the Pearl River to store their booty.

After the United States annexed the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Remeaux continued to operate in the Pearl River area relatively undisturbed by the US Navy until 1814. However in November 1814, General Andrew Jackson and his army on their march from Mobile to New Orleans commandeered all sailing vessels around Pearlington to transport a portion of the soldiers and heavy equipment and artillery to New Orleans to prepare for the expected battle with the British. Many of these boats belonged to Remeaux's pirates. Accordingly Remeaux joined forces with Jackson. Nonetheless just before hostilities commenced in Chalmette, Remeaux and his men crossed over



The Pirate House in Waveland (c.1803—1969)

It was destroyed by Hurricane Camille in 1969.

to the British side of the conflict. In the ensuing battle Remaux and most of his men were killed.

One of the most beautiful waterfront mansions in Waveland was destroyed by Hurricane Camille in 1969. Historian Russell Guerin has researched the property, known as the Pirate House thoroughly and reports that the building was a perfect example of the Louisiana planter type thought to have been built in 1803. Charles Gayarre writes in his *History of Louisiana* that “Negroes were daily smuggled into the territory through the Spanish possessions by way of lakes Borgne, Pontchartrain, and Maurepas.” Guerin has discovered documentation in Colonial Spanish records indicating ownership of the Pirate House by Louis Boisdore and Antoine Peytavin, who were related by marriage. Peytavin was a resident merchant of New Orleans whose family

were planters in south Louisiana around Convent in St. James Parish. In addition Peytavin bought and sold slaves both legally and illegally. Louisiana records show that he had 218 known legal transactions in slaves. The Pirate House was a site of dealing slaves in 1806-1807 and was eventually seized by Spanish authorities for slave trafficking in 1807. According to local legend, Laurel Wood Plantation located on Mulatto Bayou was also employed to transfer illegal slaves acquired from large ocean going pirate ships to be smuggled into the Louisiana territory in smaller sailboats such as sloops.

In conclusion, the difference between a pirate, a privateer, and a patriot may merely be the flag the ship was flying at one particular time or place. In 1815 Jean Lafitte joined forces with General Andrew Jackson in the Battle of New Orleans. Immediately after the battle, he was par-

doned for any previous crimes of piracy and declared a patriot hero. Years later historians in the antebellum south continued to consider Lafitte and the many other pirates or privateers like him more patriot than pirate. Smugglers in 1832 had transferred over five thousand African slaves a year to southern plantations. Southern authors believed pirates rendered a vital service to planter economy. In that mind frame pirates and privateers were held in great respect rather than defamed. Pierre Remaux might have been recorded by historians as a hero had he not betrayed Jackson and defected to the British. The Pirate House is remembered as a beautiful waterfront mansion, but in 1807 it was a metaphor for pirate smuggling which was principally African slave trafficking. In a forthcoming article about Hancock County history, the subject of Gen-



“Jean Laffite first appeared in New Orleans in 1803, but when was he born?”

“Marseilles, Bordeaux, St. Dominique? No one knows, because he told different stories to different people. He was the son of aristocrats guillotined during the French Revolution. He fled the slave revolts on the island of Haiti. Yet his instinctive familiarity with the marshes and bayous from New Orleans to the Gulf of Mexico and his ability to converse in French, Spanish, English, or Italian suggest that he grew up in the region where he plied his trade.

“In 1803 New Orleans became

part of the United States, but it was settled by the French, sold to Spain, and then returned to the French before Napoleon sold the territory to Thomas Jefferson. In spite of these changes, the city retained its French customs and language. Americans, including the new governor—William C. C. Claiborne—were not welcomed, partly because they considered the citizens of New Orleans to be lazy and lawless. They were aghast at the Creoles’ toleration smuggling, which hindered merchant trade. Things came to a head between Claiborne and Laffite in 1813 when the governor issued a \$500 reward for the privateer’s arrest. Within a week of the posting of those notices, new wanted posters appeared, offering \$1,000 to anyone who delivered Governor Claiborne to Baratavia. They were signed, Jean Laffite.”

SOURCE:

Vallar, Cindy. “Jean Lafitte-Enigma, Legend, American Hero?” *History Is Now*. Nov. 20, 2013. March 6, 2019 <historyisnow.com.blog>.



No definite drawings or portraits of Jean Lafitte exist. However, the two shown here seem to be the most popular except for the ones of actors who have portrayed him in movies.

eral Andrew Jackson and the Battle of New Orleans will be addressed.

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You may have your registration plaque mounted on a decorative wooden frame for an additional charge. The tree frame, shown in the photograph above, costs \$30, the smaller two rectangular frames just below it are \$10 each, and the larger rectangular frame at the bottom is \$15. Please place your order for the decorative frame when you place your

**“UNDER THE OAKS”
Spring Pilgrimage House Tour**

The Bay Waveland Garden Club Spring Pilgrimage on March 23, 2019, features four houses and Christ Episcopal Church, all of which have significant live oaks on their properties. Two houses are in Waveland and the other two as well as Christ Church are in the Bay. The tour is from 12:00 noon to 4:00 p.m. and is free and open to the public. If you have enjoyed this issue’s article on live oaks, don’t miss this opportunity to view the oaks up close and personal.

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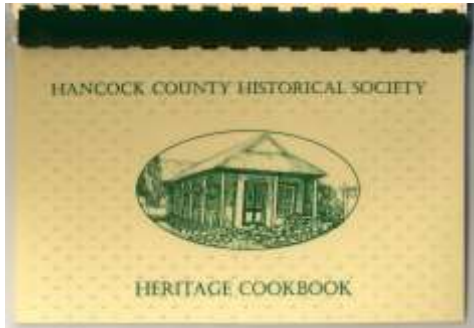
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