Lafitte, a Calcasieu Legend

Spirit of Lafitte, Maybe Gold, Still Haunts Winding Calcasieu

By BILLY MCGRAW

The early part of the 19th century produced many legends around Lake Charles and the Calcasieu area. Probably the most prominent of these legends and the one most discussed concerns the exploits of Jean Lafitte.

Historical facts collected from local citizens and a thesis written on the early history of Lake Charles support belief that Lafitte actually made Lake Charles his “headquarters” for several years during the time previously mentioned.

The unsettled conditions and inability of the law to act seem to have been dominant factors which aided the great pirate in his operation.

Records show that Lafitte, when he was about 30 years old, made friends with Charles Sallier, the first white man to build a home on the lakefront. Sallier built a small, log cabin on the site of the present Barbe family home on Shell Beach drive.

Arrangements were made between the two to establish a trading system, Sallier agreed to furnish Lafitte fresh meat and vegetables in return for wines, brandies and tobacco.

When government war ships were patrolling the coast, Lafitte and his men remained for days at camp on the lakeshore. Lafitte used this time to visit settlers or make overland trips as far east as the Mississippi river.

Many times Lafitte slipped past government boats at the mouth of the Calcasieu river under a fog cover and reached Lake Charles safely to deposit the vast treasure. On one such occasion, Lafitte learned that a government vessel was preparing to pursue him up the river. He immediately made preparations by building fortifications on the bank of Shell beach.

After completion of the fort, Lafitte ordered his men to sink his schooner with one of the fort’s cannons. This was work in vain, because the commander of the government vessel never pressed the pursuit of Lafitte.

Following this incident, Lafitte was reported to have received the services of the United States government and fought in the Battle of New Orleans.

Other stories regarding Lafitte say he later received a pardon from the government and became good friends with Napoleon.

After Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo and lost power in Europe, he decided to escape to America. He first collected a vast amount of gold and jewels.

He then set sail for America with Lafitte, but was captured before he could escape the coast. Lafitte was able to escape.

With the wealth secured by Napoleon, Lafitte reached Louisiana and buried the treasure along the Calcasieu river.

This tale has some probability since Napoleon did try to escape to America.

Contraband Bayou is also an area where great treasures are reported to have been hidden. The name originated from legends that told of Lafitte’s crews unloading cargoes of contraband goods here.

The adventures of Lafitte can never be reported in full. It seems that only the Calcasieu and its tributaries can tell the whole story.

It still remains the belief of many people that if the waters of the river could speak, they would tell the resting place of Lafitte. No definite record appears to exist to give the death and burial of the pirate.

According to the majority of records reviewed and studied by this reporter, a large number of people seem to think Lafitte was buried on the eastern shore of Lake Charles and that his spirit still guards the treasure of Napoleon.

Care to conquer the spirit and spend some time on a treasure hunt?