PAUL BOUET LAFFITTE:
A BORDERLANDS LIFE

by Robert C. Vogel

About 1760 a young Gascon departed from Bordeaux for North America. Landing in Canada, he made the acquaintance of old colonials who good-naturedly communicated some of the lore of the Louisiana country to him. The information changed the destination of the young man to New Orleans, where he was for several years engaged in a mercantile house. Sometime around 1769 he sold his stock, invested the proceeds in trade goods, and journeyed up the Red River to the Natchitoches Post. In October 1770, we find him among the traders with Athanase de Mezieres at the Grand Caddo village located near present-day Texarkana. Such was the beginning of Paul Bouet Laffitte's life in the Louisiana-Texas borderlands.¹

In the eighteenth century, the valley of the Red River represented a cultural and ecological fault zone that separated not only the Gulf Coast from the Great Plains but the colonial realms of Louisiana and Texas as well.² For centuries prior to the era of European exploration and settlement, the region had been the meeting ground of the Caddoan, Muskogean, Natchezan, and Tunican cultures. The country around Natchitoches functioned as a revolving door for people, goods, and ideas that moved between the Lower Mississippi Valley and the Southern Great Plains. Against the backdrop of long-established Indian patterns of cross-cultural exchange, French and Spanish colonial spheres of influence merged along this narrow borderland during the late seventeenth century and overlapped each other early in the eighteenth, with Anglo-American interlopers leavening the cultural milieu. An expression of both edge geography and frontier history, this unique borderlands environment hosted cross-cultural brokers, adventurers, and outlaws.³

Much of Paul Bouet Laffitte’s early life is obscure, surrounded by a two-century-old haze of legend and conjecture. He was born about 1744, in the village of Pouyrodore, near l’Ectoure, in Gascony, of a bourgeoisie family, the son of Francois and Marianne Laffitte. He had the rudiments of a classical education and as an adult devoted much energy to correspondence, which he composed in a prosaic, business-like style. Shortly after arriving in Natchitoches, he married Marie Magdeleine Grappe in a ceremony performed by the curé of the post of St. Jean Baptiste des Natchitoches. Sixteen-year-old Marie Magdeleine, the daughter of Alexis Grappe and Anne Guedon, was a native of Natchitoches. To this union would come four children, three boys and a girl. Marie Magdeleine died in January 1781, most likely from complications of childbirth. In 1782 Laffitte married nineteen-year-old Marie Anne (Marianne) de Soto, the daughter of Antonio Manuel de Soto y Bermudes and Marie des Nieges Juchereau de St. Denis. Over the next twenty-eight years Marianne gave birth to nine children, three sons and six daughters.⁴

Laffitte benefited enormously from family connections. His fathers-in-

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law were among the most influential men on the Louisiana-Texas frontier, with direct links to the founders of both Natchitoches and Los Adaes. Alexis Grappe was the titular corporal and interpreter of the French garrison at Fort St. Louis de Cadodacho and the de facto superintendent of the Natchitoches trade with the Caddo. Marie Magdeleine’s brother, Francois Grappe, alias Toutine, inherited the mantle of cross-cultural broker between the Caddo and the Natchitoches traders after Corporal Alexis’ death in 1776 and went on to serve as interpreter and agent under both Spain and the United States. Not the least important of the Grappe family’s connections were their recorded and fictive lineages to the various native cultures.

Among the De Soto and St. Denis clans, Laffitte’s kin were members of the colonial elite who controlled trading posts, plantations, and ranches that stretched from the headwaters of the Sabine to the prairies of Opelousas. Marianne’s mother was a daughter of Louis Juchereau de St. Denis, the famous cavalier who founded the Natchitoches Post in 1713, and his Spanish bride, Manuela Sanchez. Her paternal grandfather, Manuel de Soto y Bermudes, was a pioneer at Los Adaes and one of the dominant figures in the Texas Indian trade from the 1740s through the 1770s. Other prominent members of the extended St. Denis family included Louis de Blanc and Athanase de Mezieres, Indian traders and commandants at Natchitoches Post under the Spanish regime. Laffitte’s brother-in-law, Marcelo de Soto, was also active in the Indian trade. He served stints as a local government official under both the Spanish and the Americans and inherited from Soto Bermudes the strategic crossroads at Bayou Pierre, where the contraband trace to Texas intersected the ancient trading path between Natchitoches and the upper Red River.

Over time, Laffitte’s familial ties brought him considerable land holdings, mostly in the territory north and west of the Natchitoches Post, that provided access to the Indian trade. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Laffitte was most closely linked to the Yatasi, the Caddoan group whose tribal homeland comprised much of what is today De Soto Parish. In 1781 he obtained a license and established himself as the Yatasi’s resident trader. Later he secured permission to trade with the Cadodacho, Kichai, and other nations. No doubt these commercial contracts were the Spanish government’s quasi-official affirmation of the Grappe and De Soto legacies of trading posts and vacheries, or stock fanns among the tribes north of Natchitoches. In 1787 Laffitte purchased from Chief Antoine the site of the ancient Yatasi village on the Bayou Pierre branch of Red River, and when the tribe moved to a new village farther inland he moved with them, eventually obtaining a requette, or land grant, from Texas authorities for a large tract near the headwaters of the Bayou San Patricio (south of present-day Mansfield). Through his De Soto and St. Denis connections, Laffitte may have controlled for a time the site of the original Adaes Indian village located north of Spanish Lake, and he doubtless inherited access to the remote trading post at Le Dout on the upper Sabine River, which during the middle eighteenth century was the focal point for a lucrative traffic in firearms and livestock involving Apaches, Bidai middlemen, and the Hasinai confederacy.
One of the earliest nodes of European settlement in the Louisiana-Texas borderlands bore the name of Bayou aux Pierres (in Spanish, Bayuco de las Piedras). The settlement was named in allusion to one of the streams that flowed out of the rugged, almost mountainous highland district northwest of Natchitoches. Described on modern maps as both Sawmill Creek and Mundy Bayou, it rises in the Dolet Hills near Naborton and descends through a series of bench-like terraces to Bayou Pierre Lake (the former Lac du Yatasi) in the alluvial valley of the Red River. More of a creek than a slough, it does in fact flow over several rock ledges and was for uncounted generations an important local source of chert, the raw material for Indian-chipped stone arrowheads and tools. At the dawn of the historic period, the Yatasi had one of their most important villages on a high point overlooking Bayou Pierre and it was here, circa 1722, that French traders erected a small, fortified trading station, intending for it to function both as a depot and as an observation post for monitoring the strategic detour around the Great Raft in the Red River. Essentially an outlier of Natchitoches, the La Pointe post formed the nucleus of a polyglot community of Frenchmen, Spaniards, Caddoans, and mixed bloods that coalesced after circa 1750 as the Bayou Pierre settlement. By tacit agreement between the commandants at Natchitoches and Los Adaes, the Bayou Pierre settlement, being within the watershed of the Red River, was treated as a dependency of the Natchitoches Post and therefore subject to the governance of Louisiana. Following the abandonment of the Presidio Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Los Adaes in 1773, individual Louisianians began migrating into the area southwest of Bayou Pierre where, without the permission of the commandant of Natchitoches, they took over the ranches and farms originally carved out of the wilderness by the Adaesanos. By the time the refugees from Los Adaes had established their new community at Nacogdoches under Antonio Gil Ybarvo in 1779, Boïet Laffitte had emerged as the leading settler of the new and enlarged Bayou Pierre settlement.

Having re-established a physical presence in northeastern Texas, the military government of the Provincias Internas directed Ybarvo to attach the residue of the old Adaes settlement to the jurisdiction of Nacogdoches. In 1784, acting in his capacity as lieutenant governor of the province of Texas, Ybarvo granted Laffitte and two of his minor sons a large tract in the heart of the original Bayou Pierre settlement on the eastern (i.e., Red River) slope of the watershed divide. This provoked a turf war with the commandant in Natchitoches, Louis de Blanc, who insisted that all of the Bayou Pierre settlement came under his civil and military authority. On the last day of 1792, Commandant Ybarvo declared all of the “foreigners” living within the Bayou Pierre district to be under the civil jurisdiction of Nacogdoches, and two years later Paul Boïet Laffitte was granted permission to remain at Bayuco de las Piedras as a citizen of Texas. Laffitte, who had already taken to styling himself Pablo Laffitte, Vecino del Bayuco de las Piedras, in civil documents, thereafter allowed his family to be enumerated in the census of Nacogdoches. In 1795 he was appointed syndic at Bayou Pierre, where he exercised the civil functions of a justice of the peace under the authority of the province of Texas.
Not long after his arrival in the Natchitoches region, Laffitte had embarked upon the Indian trade, which he followed intermittently throughout his life and supplemented with more lucrative pursuits. By the late 1770s Laffitte had begun importing large numbers of horses and cattle from the upper Red River country, which he grazed on his several vacheries. His principal ranch covered an area of more than 5,000 acres, with pasturage for more than 300 horned cattle, together with horses, hogs, and sheep. His other large holding was an immense stretch of rangeland at a place called Las Hormigas ("the ant hill"), an expanse of prairie between the Bayou San Patricio and the Sabine River in the vicinity of present-day Converse, Sabine Parish. In addition to corn and small grains, he raised tobacco, which was shipped by wagon to Nacogdoches and sold to the government factor for use in the Texas Indian trade.

Laffitte was an enthusiastic and consistent contrabandist. Smuggling flourished everywhere along the Louisiana-Texas frontier, especially in the Bayou Pierre district where the hand of the law was weaker and geography provided hideouts and cache places without number. More importantly, the Bayou Pierre settlement straddled the ancient trading paths that connected Natchitoches and the Cadodacho, Hasinai, and Wichita villages with Nacogdoches, and Gil Ybarvo's order granting Laffitte and his sons the spread between the Bayou Pierre and Bayou Nabonchasse had included the provision that they keep a lookout for contrabandists. The irony of this must have been delicious, since the founder of Nacogdoches was himself a notorious smuggler. The Ybarvo ranch at Lobanillo, located west of the Sabine, was situated on the Camino del Caballo, also known as the Contraband Trace. Laffitte's establishment at Bayou Pierre lay at the eastern terminus of the smugglers' road. Manufactured goods were the principal items of contraband bound for Texas, with hides, bear oil, cattle, horses, and Indian slaves carried back to Louisiana. Notwithstanding crown regulations restricting commercial intercourse between Louisiana and Texas, the inhabitants of Los Adaes and later Nacogdoches were dependent upon the Louisiana settlers for foodstuffs and building materials, just as Louisiana merchants came to depend upon Texas as a source of hard currency and livestock. Throughout the colonial period, the post commandants and their officers were accused of aiding and abetting smugglers, usually with good reason, and during most of the eighteenth century the value of the contraband trade likely outweighed that of the legitimate commerce carried on between the two provinces. Describing the character of the inhabitants of the Nacogdoches district, including the Bayou Pierre settlement, one of the commandants declared flatly that "most of them are concealers of contraband goods."

Smuggling was easy to disguise as sanctioned trade with the Indians and in many cases hardly could be distinguished from it. The official Spanish policy of restricting the trade between Natchitoches and the Indian nations was unenforceable, and the Natchitoches traders constantly agitated for removal of the trade restrictions. Laffitte himself appears to have been involved in the lucrative and highly illegal traffic in firearms with the nomadic plains tribes
through Bidai intermediaries on the upper Sabine. No matter how many gaboteurs (unlicensed traders) were arrested, the contraband trade with the Indians was never suppressed and remained a constant source of friction among provincial administrators.

One of the most interesting aspects of borderlands commerce was the traffic in livestock between the Indian nations of the Southern Great Plains and Louisiana. This trade was maintained in various ways but its geographic pattern followed the ancient salt and bow wood (bois d'arc) trade routes that had originated in prehistoric times. European traders based in Natchitoches or Bayou Pierre ascended the Red River to its great bend between modern-day Texas and Oklahoma, and attended the seasonal fairs held outside the fortified villages of the Wichita and other Plains Caddoan tribes. They changed hardware, textiles, tobacco, liquor, firearms, and ammunition for cattle, horses, and mules brought to the fairs by Comanche and other Plains nomads, the booty from their continual raiding of the missions and pueblos in Texas, New Mexico, and Coahuila. Texas and Louisiana frontiersmen were also avid horse catchers: according to the acting governor of Texas, in 1803 "the hunting of mustangs (a species in which the Province abounds) is the second object [after buffalo hunting] that appeals particularly to the inclination of all its inhabitants." Both Bouet Laffitte and Toulouse Grappe stocked their vacheries with animals from the upper Red River, which they drove to markets in Opelousas, Natchez, and New Orleans. The trade in wild mustangs captured on the Llano Estacado boomed during the 1790s due to the increased demand for horseflesh on the plantations of the lower Mississippi Valley.

By the turn of the century, Laffitte was an economic and social presence, indeed a pillar of the community, in both Natchitoches and Nacogdoches. His commercial and kinship connections ensured that his council was sought by influential men on both sides of the frontier, as well as among the native tribes. There was probably no one who more keenly appreciated the effects, both commercial and political, which the Treaty of 1763 had on the broad pattern of life in the Louisiana-Texas borderlands. Not unexpectedly, his trans-borderlands ties also made him a lightning rod for controversy.

Following in the footsteps of his wife's St. Denis and De Soto forebears, Laffitte developed a remarkable gift for cross-border intrigue. His establishment in the Bayou Pierre settlement was a bone of contention between Texas and Louisiana officials for years and involved him in complex dealings involving land, cross-border trade, and Indian affairs with Gil Ybarbo and other border captains. Late in the 1790's, Laffitte was at the center of a prolonged and heated controversy over the conduct of the Indian trade that led to feuds with Natchitoches commandant Louis DeBlanc and his subordinate, Bernardo Dortolant. Anyone even casually inspecting the civil records of the Natchitoches and Nacogdoches posts cannot help but notice the frequent appearance of Laffitte's name in connection with various legal actions resulting from unpaid debts, unfulfilled contracts, and boundary disputes. One incident involved a fistfight between Laffitte and Natchitoches surgeon Francois Lacaze, a member of the Cabildo, who brought charges against Laffitte for assault and
Quite a bit of Laffitte's correspondence survives. Often he used letters to associates and relatives to pour out wrath on his enemies and on those public men whose influence he believed mischievous.

Being of a romantic and intemperate disposition, Laffitte was not averse to an occasional outburst of rowdism. He relished playing the role of *Revenant*, or ghost rider, in the so-called "Natchitoches revolt" in 1795, a curious episode that resulted from Governor Francisco Luis Carondelet's decision to recall the priest Jean Delvaux from Natchitoches for alleged seditious behavior. Laffitte and other Delvaux partisans composed seditious songs, danced drunkenly, and made violent threats against their monarchist neighbors. While France and Spain were at war between 1793 and 1795, nervous Spanish officials in Texas suspected Laffitte of being connected in some way with Jacobean plots and the importation of revolutionary books. Occasionally, while searching through the confiscated papers of foreigners and suspected troublemakers, they found missives from Boüet Laffitte, at least one of which may have been composed in some sort of private code. Though the evidence is far from conclusive, it seems likely that Laffitte was an abiding liberal who sympathized with the broad goals of the French Revolution, though he was never so indiscreet as to openly embrace rebellion against the Spanish king.

Enter Philip Nolan, around whom so much history and legend has clustered that he has become one of the heroic figures in the pageant of the Anglo-American West. Born in Belfast in 1777, Nolan immigrated to the United States and made his way to Kentucky, where he became a protégé of James Wilkinson. Unheralded, but carrying a passport from Louisiana Governor Miró, Nolan appeared in Texas in 1791, where he lived among the Indians for two years, and later, in 1794 and 1797, led horse-catching expeditions to Texas. Using Nacogdoches as his base, Nolan and his associates operated over a large area in Texas and Nuevo Santander, capturing wild mustangs for importation into Louisiana. In the process he aroused the suspicion of Spanish officials, who came to regard Nolan as an American *agent provocateur* whose chief object was to stir up the Indians against Spanish rule.

Most historical accounts of Nolan's adventurers point out that while the ostensible purpose of his expeditions was to procure mustangs and bring them out of Texas under Spanish license, he was in fact conducting a private reconnaissance of the interior provinces of northeastern New Spain on behalf of Wilkinsons. Some have gone so far as to state that he was a filibuster, the spearhead of an Anglo American incursion into the Spanish territories. Thus, when he set out for Texas a fourth time, provincial officials refused to issue him a passport. Undeterred, Nolan's expedition, consisting of eighteen Americans, seven Spaniards, and two African-American slaves, set out from Natchez in October 1800. From deserters and secret agents along the Mississippi the Spanish learned that Nolan was heading for the upper Brazos River, and on August 8, 1800, Pedro de Nava, commander in chief of the *Provincias Internas*, instructed Juan Bautista Elguézebal, acting governor of
Texas, to arrest Nolan if he returned to that province. Elguézabal ordered the
commanding officer in Nacogdoches to lead a patrol to take Nolan into
custody. Upon receipt of this order, Lieutenant Manuel Múquiz set out from
Nacogdoches on March 4, 1801, at the head of a column of 120 mounted
troops. With the help of Tawakoni scouts, he located Nolan's fortified camp
near Blum, Hill County, Texas, on March 21. Nolan and his men were taken
by surprise and, after a brief fight in which Nolan was killed by a gunshot to
the head, the mustangers surrendered.37

Paul Boilet Laffitte was in Nacogdoches when Múquiz returned to the
presidio with his prisoners. The Americans were secured in a house on the
town plaza under armed guard and the Spaniards were locked up in the
presidio’s rather dilapidated calabozo.38 On the morning of April 13, Múquiz
visited the Spanish prisoners and discovered that someone had slipped a “half­
round file” into the lockup. A subsequent investigation traced the file to
Laffitte, who was arrested and placed under guard in a pair of fetters.39 As a
further precaution, Múquiz dispatched Pierre Dolet, now the acting syndic at
Bayou Pierre, to confiscate the “small cannon” Laffitte kept on the patio of his
home.40 Laffitte denied any part in the attempted jailbreak and later claimed
to have been intoxicated on the night in question. Because Laffitte was never
formally charged with being one of Nolan’s accomplices, we may surmise that
he may simply have been sympathetic to the plight of the captured Spaniards,
several of whom were native Texans and therefore probably known to him
personally. While Laffitte was profoundly shocked by the unfortunate turn of
events, he was not disillusioned. He and his wife had friends in high places and
they quickly reached out to them – but to no avail. In October, after enduring
a sweltering summer in the Nacogdoches calaboose, a chastised Pablo Laffitte
wrote a personal note to Governor Elguézabal, pleading for him to “deliver me
from the purgatory of which I have been for several months quite innocent.”41

The news that Boilet Laffitte had been locked up in the Nacogdoches
guardroom led to an explosion of indignation among the Caddoans, which
caused not a little anxiety among his captors. In June, the commandant at
Nacogdoches reported to Governor Elguézabal that the Cadodachos, Nadacos,
and other tribes were agitating for Laffitte’s release. Somewhat at a loss to
account for the unexpected reaction of the normally docile Indians, the
commandant postulated that the trouble was being stirred up by Laffitte’s wife
and friends in Louisiana. The governor urged his subordinates to be alert and
ordered Lieutenant Bernard Dortolant to stand by with his artillery should it
become necessary to repel an assault on the presidio.42 For a time it seemed as
if the Spanish would be forced to send Laffitte back to Louisiana or risk an
outbreak of hostilities with the Indians. Sensing that events were drifting
beyond his control, Elguézabal determined that there were mitigating
circumstances and ordered Laffitte banished from Texas rather than put on
trial.43 Accordingly, Don Pablo was released from his seven-month stay in
purgatory and sent packing across the frontier to Louisiana.44 An unrepentant
Boilet Laffitte moved back to his old rancho at the headwaters of the Bayou
San Patricio, on the old border line where he could live with one foot planted
in Louisiana and the other in Texas, under the protection of brother-in-law Marcelo de Soto who had succeeded him as syndic at Bayou Pierre. None of his Texas property was confiscated, though his cannon was unceremoniously added to the presidio's modest arsenal.

While the Philip Nolan affair may have been the watershed event in Bouet Laffitte's life, it was the Louisiana Purchase that marked the turning point in the history of the Louisiana-Texas borderlands. Previously, the frontier settlements had been bound together by a complex web of kinship and exchange ties. Indeed, throughout the colonial period the political boundary between Texas and Louisiana was little more than an abstraction. As demonstrated by the symbiotic relationship that evolved between Natchitoches, Los Adaes, and Nacogdoches, it was certainly no barrier to the movement of people, goods, or ideas, but served primarily as window dressing for the provincial military and administrative functionaries whose jobs were to project imperial authority without upsetting the status quo. The Treaty of 1763 gave the people of the Louisiana-Texas borderlands three decades to work out their own destiny with a minimum of meddling from the centers of power. But as soon as the United States acquired Louisiana, American policy makers became conscious of the need to extend their hegemony over the territory between the Red and Sabine rivers. Through the reports of Dr. John Sibley and other agents, officials in Washington and New Orleans had come to appreciate that the Red River country above Natchitoches possessed great strategic value, offering as it did control over the principal trade route between Louisiana and the Indian nations of the southern plains. In addition, the Bayou Pierre district was an important regional source of foodstuffs and contained thousands of acres of prime farmland, always a magnet for land-hungry American frontiersmen.

The Jefferson Administration claimed that eastern Texas should be considered part of Louisiana by virtue of its discovery and exploration by the French, but the Spanish refused to negotiate, insisting that Louisiana extended no farther west than the middle of the Red River. To forestall American aggression, Nemesio Salcedo, who had replaced Pedro de Nava as commandant-general of the Provincias Internas, ordered reinforcements sent to the frontier garrisons at La Bahía and Nacogdoches and placed Lieutenant Colonel Simón de Herrera, governor of Neuvo León, in command of a force that eventually totaled more than 1,000 men. In an attempt to intimidate the Spaniards into yielding the territory on the east bank of the Sabine, American troops from Fort Claiborne in Natchitoches harassed the Spanish outposts at the Adaes and Bayou Pierre. Early in 1806, a large force was dispatched to Natchitoches under the command of the General James Wilkinson, Philip Nolan's old patron. The rascally Wilkinson, for years a Spanish secret agent, had no intention of bringing Herrera's army to battle, however, and after several months of bloodless maneuver the showdown on the Sabine ended when the two commanders entered into a truce on November 5, 1806. This agreement solemnly asserted that the strip of territory along the east side of the Sabine (the boundaries were never officially described) was to be a
demilitarized Neutral Ground jointly patrolled by the forces of His Catholic Majesty and the United States until such time as their respective governments could negotiate a diplomatic settlement. 49

With the Neutral Ground established, the Americans soon came knocking at Paul Bou"et Laffitte’s door to obtain intelligence. As early as 1810, parts of the Neutral Ground had become such intolerable nests of bandits, adventurers, and runaway slaves that Spanish and United States regulars mounted joint patrols to evict the ruffians. Although the Bayou Pierre settlers themselves had grievances against both governments, they were hospitable to Spanish and American troops and sometimes served as guides. 50 Despite his age, Laffitte was still an important local power broker, distinguished for his energy and intellect if not for his discretion. Laffitte seems to have begun to cooperate with American agents before the Neutral Ground confrontation and soon became a principal source of intelligence on conditions inside Texas and the eastern interior provinces. When the Mexican revolution broke out in 1810, public opinion among the Creoles in Natchitoches, Nacogdoches, and Bayou Pierre appears to have been somewhat confused, but Laffitte clearly sympathized with the rebels.51 Paul Bou"et himself sheltered Bernardo Gutierrez de Lara and Captain Jose Menchaca, adherents of the revolutionary Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla’s abortive uprising in Mexico, when they fled across Texas into Louisiana in the summer of 1811. 52 However, his sympathies for the Mexican insurgents did not extend to the Anglo-American filibustering expeditions that were sent across the Neutral Ground. 53 In letters to Texas officials, Don Pablo frequently noted with disgust the outbreaks of brigandage that accompanied the incursions of Gutierrez, Augustus Magee, and Jose Alvarece Toledo y Dubois, and he continually petitioned the governors of Texas to grant him and his sons new lands in the interior. 54 While Spanish officials tended to deprecate the Laffittes’ pledges of loyalty to the sovereign, they continued to rely upon Don Pablo and his sons as sources of raw intelligence concerning filibusters and pirates. 55

With his family’s affairs in this critical state, Paul Bou"et Laffitte died, probably in late 1815 or early 1816, aged approximately seventy. The archival record offers hardly a clue as to the exact date or place of his demise, but he must have died somewhere outside of Natchitoches Parish because his funeral was not recorded in the church registers there. From 1817 until her death in 1833 in the riverside village of Campti, Marianne styled herself as his widow in letters and public documents 56 Paul’s first-born son, Pierre Paul Bou"et Laffitte, emerged as the new family patriarch and was a well-known and popular figure in the Bayou Pierre district. He died in 1850 on the ancient Laffitte grant overlooking Bayou Pierre Lake and was buried in the family graveyard near the crossroads hamlet of Carmel. Within less than a generation, he passed into legend not as the heir of Paul Bou"et Laffitte, but as the fictive son of Pierre Laffite, the Baratarian pirate. This misconception, which originated in the 1830s and continues to surface in print, caused a local avocational historian to have a state historical marker placed in the cemetery at Carmel in 1955. 57 It reads: “Pierre Boitt Lafitte [sic]. Grave of Pierre Boitt
Lafitte, son of pirate Pierre Lafitte, hero in defense of New Orleans against British in 1815. He owned an 11,393 acre grant. A community, lake and river were named for him. The marker is still there, refurbished by the state, and its text is displayed on the World Wide Web as one of De Soto Parish's historical attractions.

Somewhere in the borderlands, Paul Boüet Laffitte turns in his grave.

NOTES

1See Conveyances Book 3, document number 642, archives of the Natchitoches Parish Clerk of Court, Natchitoches Parish Courthouse, Natchitoches (hereafter cited as Natchitoches Courthouse Records).


There is a file containing miscellaneous Grappe family material in the Natchitoches Genealogical and Historical Association Library, Natchitoches, Louisiana. See also The Dictionary of Louisiana Biography, I, p. 355; Dana Bowker l.c.c., "Francois Grappe and the Caddo Land Cession," North Louisiana Historical Association Journal 20 (Summer, 1989), pp. 53-69; Bernie Grappe, "Francois Grappe - Unique North Louisiana Frontiersman," North Louisiana Historical Association Journal 9 (Summer 1978), pp. 65-70; David LaVere and Katie Campbell, eds. and trans., "An Expedition to the Kichai: The Journal of Francois Grappe, September 24, 1783." Southwestern Historical Quarterly 98 (July 1994), pp. 59-78; LaVere, The Caddo Chiefdoms, pp. 82-86.


Reports, depositions, and surveys relating to the various Laffitte grants are in Claims, Northwest Louisiana District, Louisiana State Land Office, Baton Rouge. Summaries of many of these claims, with the texts of original grants and supporting documents, were printed in The American State Papers: Public Lands series.

Laffitte and Louis De Blanc's 1781 request to trade with the Caddo is in the Natchitoches Genealogical Society Collection, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Watson Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches; Conveyance Book 20, document no. 2149, Natchitoches Courthouse Records. See also Antoine's letter to "Mon frere" [Laffitte], April 3, 1792, legajo 213, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla (microfilm). The document recording Laffitte's purchase of the Yatasi village from Chief Antoine is in the Henry Collection at the Watson Library, Natchitoches; LaVere, in The Caddo Chieftdoms, p. 88, states that the Yatasi sold their village to pay off their debts. Laffitte's move to the Bayou de la Grand Prairie in circa 1790 and his land grant there are described in the Rio Hondo claims files of the Northwest Louisiana Land District, Louisiana State Land Office.


Gil Ybarvo to Hugo Oconor, August 1, 1784, and Ybarvo to Muñoz, December 31, 1791, and May 14, 1792, Bexar Archives. The jurisdictional dispute began around 1780; see Domingo Cabello to Pedro de Nava, March 3, 1784, Bexar Archives; Ybarvo to Rosseau, January 5, 1786, Melrose Collection, Watson Library, Natchitoches; Ybarvo to Muñoz, November 19, 1791, Bexar Archives.

The text of Ybarvo's requête is printed in translation in American State Papers: Public Lands, IV, p. 46; Claims and Tract Books, Northwest Louisiana District, Louisiana State Land Office.

See Louis de Blanc to Governor Esteban Miró, January 15, 1790, legajo 16, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Archivo General de Indias; Ybarvo to Muñoz, December 31, 1791, Bexar Archives.

Jose Miguel de Moral to Governor of Texas, January 28, 1800, Bexar Archives. Laffitte appears in the Nacogdoches census after 1793; Nacogdoches Archives, Texas State Library, Austin.

Muñoz to Cordova, November 16, 1793, Bexar Archives; Gregory, "Eighteenth Century Caddoan Archaeology," LaVere, The Caddo Chieftdoms, pp. 40-70. See also Aubra Lane Lee, Fusils, Paint, and Pelts: An Examination of Natchitoches-Based Indian Trade in the Spanish Period, 1766-1791, M.A. thesis, Northwestern State University, 1990.


Valle journal, entries for June 4 and June 15, 1805, Bexar Archives; J. Villasana Haggard, "The House of Barr and Davenport," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 49 (July 1945), pp. 66-88; Claim no. 33-174, Northwest Louisiana District, Louisiana State Land Office.
American State Papers: Public Lands, IV, p. 46.

Bolton, Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century, p. 389.

Bolton, Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century, pp. 32-41.

Ugarte to Juan Bautista Elguezabal, November 4, 1804, Bexar Archives.

John, Storms Brewed in Other Men’s Worlds, pp. 431-464ff; Bolton, Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century, p. 118.


Report of Governor Juan Bautista Elguezabal, June 20, 1803, Bexar Archives.


Louis de Blanc to Esteban Miró, January 15, 1790, legajo 16, Papelas Procedentes de Cuba, Archivo General de Indias. Laffitte and Dortolant also had a disagreement over the disposition of Marie Magdeleine Grappe’s estate, which was administered by Dortolant in 1782; Bernard Dortolant petition to Commandant Louis Borme, Melrose Collection, Watson Library.

Lacaze brought charges against Laffitte and the case was adjudicated in New Orleans during December, 1781.


Testimony of Jose Piernas, Carlos Ximenes, and others in the papers of Luis Bishop Penalver y Cardenaz, Archdiocese of New Orleans Collection (microfilm), Notre Dame University Archives, South Bend, Indiana.

See the report concerning foreigners in Nacogdoches. May 14, 1792, Expediente of Frenchmen in Bexar, December 3, 1792 to March 6, 1795, and Pedro de Nava to Manuel Muñoz, November 21, 1794; Joaquin Ugarte to Elguezabal, February 4, 1804, Bexar Archives.


For a modern perspective on the Nolan affair, see the website of the Sons of DeWitt Colony, Texas (www.tamu.edu/ccbn/dewitt/nolanvisit.htm).

Musquiz to Elguezabal, April 22, 1801, Bexar Archives.

Musquiz to Elguezabal, April 22 and May 1, 1801, Bexar Archives.
Músquiz to Elguézabal, May 1, 1801; Nava to Elguézabal, July 21, 1801, Bexar Archives.

Pablo Lafitte to J.B. Elguézabal, October 2, 1801, in a private collection; Marianne Soto Lafitte to Elguézabal, May 19, 1901, Bexar Archives.

Musquiz to Elguézabal, June 25, 1801; Elguézabal to Músquiz, June 29, 1801; Dortolant to Elguézabal, June 18, 1801, Bexar Archives.

Nava to Governor of Texas, October 12, 1801; Músquiz to Elguézabal, November 28, 1801; Elguézabal to Nava, January 20, 1802; Elguézabal to Nemesio Salcedo, November 21, 1804, Bexar Archives.


Commandant of Nacogdoches to governor of Texas, July, 1801, Bexar Archives; Manuel Salcedo to Martin Duralde, July 8, 1802, legajo 76, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Archivo General de Indias.

Francisco Viana to Simon de Herrera, July 3, 1806, Bexar Archives.


Sibley described the Bayou Pierre settlement in glowing terms in his "Historical Sketches," p. 728; William C. C. Claiborne to the Secretary of War, August 11, 1805, in Dunbar Rowland, ed., The Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne (Jackson, 1917), III, p. 162; Francisco Viana to Antonio Cordero, April 1, 1808, Bexar Archives.


Diary of Sergeant Garza, April 21, 1812, Bexar Archives.


Laffitte to Salcedo, January 13, 1812; see also Montero to Salcedo, March 16, 1812, and Louis Laffitte to Salcedo, August 6, 1812, Bexar Archives.

Elguézabal to Salcedo, November 21, 1804; Joaquin Ugarte to Elguézabal, February 4, 1805; document no. 107, December 30, 1814, Bexar Archives: Lafitte (sic) to Mariano Varela, November 28, 1815, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Archivo de Indias; Stanley Faye, "The Great Stroke of Pierre Lafitte," in Louisiana Historical Quarterly 23 (1940), p. 754.

Felix Trudeau to Pardo, May 12, 1817, Bexar Archives; Elizabeth Shown Mills, Natchitoches Church Marriages 1818-1850: Translated Abstracts from the Registers of St. Francois des Natchitoches, Louisiana (Tuscaloosa, 1985), p. 4; Madame Lafitte's death at Campti on October 21, 1833, is recorded in the register of the Immaculate Conception Church, Campti, Louisiana.