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JEAN LAFITTE AND MAJOR L. LATOUR IN ARKANSAS TERRITORY*

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I. LEGEND

LEGEND OFTEN PERSISTS in the memory of man when history is forgotten. Yet history may be born of nebulous myths, whenever documented facts are discovered which can be aligned with the picturesquely conjectural outlines of folklore. Legend is propagated by word of mouth; it gathers stature and sensational color with each period of revival. History is a written record of successive facts; it is in essence definite, limited in scope, and as precise as its recorder. When it is possible to merge authentic documentary evidence and legend, the resulting historic phase is indeed endowed with the vital tones of flesh and blood human experience.

Colorful is the province where history and legend blend! Such a legacy has the State of Arkansas whose wealth of spectacular lore extends back to De Soto's Expedition in the sixteenth century. Official records of the evolutionary phase of Arkansas are meager but many personal memoirs assist the historian with detailed portrayals of people, locales and events. In the main, these chronicles are personal versions of the times by strangers visiting this territory or state. It is natural that such first

* We wish to acknowledge our deep indebtedness to Mr. Stanley Faye of Aurora, Illinois, whose generous assistance made possible the completion of this manuscript.

hand experiences in the frontier country are replete with hearsay that cannot have the status of authentic history unless the facts are supported by the notes of other chroniclers of the same period or by documentary recordings.

One such substantiation can be effected in the intriguing and captivating editorial footnote that Laffite, the pirate, was the true identity of Captain Hillare, French leader of a gold searching expedition in 1809 for the fabulous lost mines on the Arkansas River above the present site of Little Rock and in the adjacent mountainous territory extending into today's Montgomery County. This story is recorded by Judge William F. Pope's personal recollections in his *Early Days in Arkansas*. He relates also,—

"After a long and painful journey up the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers, the expedition reached the present site of Little Rock, where a stop was made and a mining camp established at what is now (1894) the foot of Spring Street, and near a large spring of water which is still in existence within the Pulaski County jail yard enclosure.

"Here the members of the expedition began to prospect for gold; and here a number of the party sickened and died and were buried on the high ground just east of spring, on the spot where the State House now stands . . .

"Finding no existence of gold in the locality, the expedition moved up the river . . . set out for Crystal Hill."¹

This historic ground had originally been subject to strong objection as a site for the erection of the first State Capitol building, because of the known presence of graves on the hillside.² The tale of the ill fortunes of the above quoted party was probably revived in 1899 to save the Old State House from destruction in order to make way for its replacement by the present magnificent Arkansas Capitol.³ The beautiful edifice now known as the War Memorial still stands as an architectural monument to Arkansas' early statehood.⁴ But now a new chapter can be added to the creative role of its historic ground.

¹ Judge William F. Pope, *Early Days in Arkansas*, (Little Rock, 1895), pp. 88-93.

² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³ George Donaghey, *Building A State Capitol*, (L. R., 1937), p. 11 note, and appendage opposite p. 376.

⁴ *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. IX, No. 3, (1945), Clara B. Eno, Old and New Capitol in Arkansas, pp. 244-246.

Masked by the Laffite visitation of the Arkansas country, lies a heretofore overlooked phase of Spanish scrutiny and reconnaissance. This role the territory played inadvertently in the currently persistent struggle of Royalist Spain to maintain control west of the Mississippi River against the United States during the protracted dispute over the western boundary of the Louisiana Purchase.⁵ The contributory tide of the peaceable Anglo-American migration southwestward into Spain's new province, Texas,⁶ was at this time in its inexorable beginnings of trickling pioneer path-finders across the Arkansas territory.⁷ The sudden appearance of an organized party of foreign-speaking prospectors for gold and their glamorous privateer leader on these frontiers, suggests a hidden motive. To correlate the adventure to the times, consideration must be given to officially documented movements paralleling this lore and also to the consequent understanding of the appalling under-cover historical background of this apparently unimportant venture beyond the outposts in the Arkansas and the Red River valleys. Also Pope's story must be revised in certain essentials which are errors created partly through the "grapevine" of hearsay and more often, in this episode, through the deliberate deception of a carefully formulated conspiracy.

Without a doubt, in the summer of 1816, Jean Laffite visited Arkansas Post, was recognized there by veterans⁸ of the 1812 War, or more likely, by merchant acquaintances,⁹ and then proceeded upstream. However sharing Jean Laffite's leadership was Major Arsène Lacarrière Latour,¹⁰

⁵ Thomas M. Marshall, *A History of the Western Boundary of the Louisiana Purchase, 1819-1841*, (Berkeley, 1914), p. 13 & p. 50; Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, (Washington), vol. IV; State Papers, *Foreign Relations*, IV, pp 422-429; B. Sherman, *The Louisiana Purchase*, p. 48.

⁶ The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, vol. XVI, *History of North Mexican States and Texas*, vol. II, 1801-1889, (San Francisco 1889), p. 55.

⁷ *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. IV, (1945), Mary Eakin Dawson, "Editorial: Some Thoughts Relevant to the Early History of Arkansas"; Jolin W. Monette, M. D., *The History of the Discovery and Settlement of the Valley of the Mississippi*, vol. II, (N. Y., 1848), pp. 547-548.

⁸ Josiah H. Shinn, A. M., *Pioneers and Makers of Arkansas*, (L. R., 1908), p. 251.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47; Pope, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹⁰ Arsène Lacarrière Latour, *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana in 1814-1815*, (Philadelphia, 1816); Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana*, vol. IV, (N. O., 1879), p. 305.

mapmaker and military engineer of New Orleans..

1809, with apology to William Pope's accuracy of account, is chronologically too early for the appearance in Arkansas territory of either of the crafty brothers,¹¹ Pierre or Jean Laffite. They were at that time too busy either in their blacksmith shop in New Orleans or negotiating¹² privateer contraband traffic through the Louisiana bayous. Because of the United States law of 1808 forbidding the importation of Africans for enslavement, the Laffite brothers in 1809, were establishing a lucrative business in assisting in the smuggling of black slaves into the Mississippi River embouchure for delivery upriver.¹³ They had then neither time nor incentive for a difficult and dubious gold hunt in the uncharted wilderness of the Ozark mountains. Nor, in that year, were the brothers managers of the Baratarians.¹⁴ Nor did either ever own a French privateer ship at this early date, according to records,¹⁵ and therefore could not as yet be a Privateer or a Pirate. Their later genius for privateering was not as yet established in 1809.¹⁶ The unmatched enterprise and daring of their later operations had not developed so early. However, even in 1809, the Laffite partnership was undoubtedly well known among settlers upstream because of the brothers' growing monopoly¹⁷ in the traffic of "Prize-goods" captured within the Gulf of Mexico.

Contemporaneously, within the Arkansas country, Frederick Notrebe, who was a merchant of Arkansas Post and a reputed Napoleonic refugee of nobility probably had not yet become a resident in 1809.¹⁸ That it was he who recognized Captain Hillare as Jean Laffite is logical because Notrebe traded in New Orleans. It was Notrebe who had forwarded John Trammel's¹⁹ gold nugget found near

¹¹ *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23 (1940), Stanley Faye, "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," p. 746.

¹² Lyle Saxon, *Lafitte The Pirate*, (N. Y., 1930), p. 17 & p. 28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 47; *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, S. Faye, *op. cit.*, p. 746.

¹⁴ J. Frank Dobie, *Coronado's Children*, (N. Y., 1931), p. 311.

¹⁵ W. B., *Life of Jean Lafitte, The Pirate of the Mexican Gulf*, *Littell's Living Age*, No. 407, (March, 1852), pp. 434-436.

¹⁶ *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, S. Faye, *op. cit.*, p. 747.

¹⁷ Saxon, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-48.

¹⁸ *Arkansas Gazette*, June 11, 1944, Dr. and Mrs. T. L. Hodges, "Then Came The Notrebes."

¹⁹ Pope, *op. cit.*, p. 88; Shinn, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

Pyeatt's Landing (Crystal Hill), for assay to New Orleans. This incident started the so-called gold rush to the Arkansas River.

The principal mine of the story soon became a focus of scholarly and speculative attraction. In 1819 Nuttall, naturalist, examined critically the remains of the mine near the Pyeatt settlement by then known as the Silver mine. He declared it a source of neither gold nor silver, and apparently a hoax in that respect.²⁰ Major Long, explorer, in 1820 pronounced the geologic formation within the Arkansas Territory neither silver nor gold bearing.²¹ Nuttall found the sheds still standing. The slag suggested recent activity of the reduction furnace. Both Nuttall and the historian, Shinn, cited Louis Brangiere,²² a neighbor of Major Pyeatt, who had developed this mine prior to 1819, mistaking rock crystals and talc for silver ore in the bluff some fifteen miles above Little Rock.

Even as late as December 1819 the vicinity of the Little Rock site of the Pope's legend was only a well known landmark of rare settlements.²³ Cephas Washburn²⁴ remembered one cabin, a store, and an abandoned shack on the south bank in 1820. 1809 probably saw just transient Indians and hunters using this favorite Indian crossing,²⁵ camping and slacking their thirst at the spring of healthful water near the La Petite Rochelle.

All the foregoing circumstances imply a later dating than 1809 for Laffite's prospecting expedition on the Arkansas River. Shinn records that John Trammel found the Silver mine in 1815²⁶ and took specimens to Arkansas Post. There Notrebe, a new arrival from France and a clerk in the commission house, pronounced the ore as gold

²⁰ Early Western Travels, 1748-1846, vol. XIII, *Journal of Travels Into the Arkansas Territory During the Year 1819*, by Thomas Nuttall, F. L. S., Thwaites, editor (Clark 1905), pp. 150-151.

²¹ Early Western Travels, 1748-1846, vol. XVII, "Account of An Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains". Performed in the year 1819-1820, under command of Major S. H. Long of the U. S. Top. Engineers," Thwaites editor, (Clark, 1905), vol. IV, p. 30.

²² Nuttall, *op. cit.*, p. 146 and map frontispiece; Dallas Herndon, *Why Little Rock Was Born*, (L. R., 1933), p. 41.

²³ Cephas Washburn, *Reminiscences of the Indians*, (Richmond, 1869), pp. 95-96.

²⁴ This site became the Northwest corner of land retained by the Quapaws in their treaty of 1818. Chas. J. Kappler, *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties*, (Wash., 1914), p. 160.

²⁵ Shinn, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

bearing. This date corrects Pope's reminiscence and places Laffite's Arkansas adventure more logically in the year 1816.

To the above premises can be added the facts that Major Latour had been in 1809 only a recent arrival in New Orleans and that for years he had publicly berated all Baratarians for their illegitimate²⁷ trade-monopoly in Louisiana. Not until after the Battle of New Orleans in 1815 where the Laffites and their Baratarians distinguished themselves to save the city for the United States, did Latour become an ardent admirer and close companion²⁸ of Jean and Pierre Laffite.

A trip up the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers in the early 1800's was difficult, extremely hazardous and time consuming.²⁹ Only after the Battle of New Orleans (1815) were the Laffite brothers and the Baratarians disorganized, idle, without money, tired of prolonged good behavior as restored citizens of the United States, and in an exploratory mood for future enterprises.

Authentic documents clearly relate that Jean Laffite was missed for eight months after April of 1816. This, then, is factually the year of Jean's mysterious³⁰ absence from New Orleans and the Gulf coast. After April, 1817, the Laffites and their freebooters were successfully established at Galveston, evidently with the blessings of Onís, Spanish Minister at Washington.³¹ The conclusion is warranted that 1816 is the year of Jean Laffite's journey into the Arkansas terrain, presumably as the leader of a "French lost-mine" prospecting expedition.

II. BACKGROUND

Like all post-war periods, 1816 found the victor, the United States, in a period of increased activity, expansion, and prosperity; and a depleted power—in this case, Royalist Spain—again as in 1805 and 1806,¹ tightening its territorial belt and avidly scheming to retain or even to recover lost

²⁷ Latour, *op. cit.*; Gayarré, vol. IV, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ H. S. Chambers, *Mississippi Valley Beginnings*, p. 260.

³⁰ Bancroft, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹ Monette, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 455-459.

colonial possessions.² With England removed from the Mississippi Valley, the United States again became Spain's target of intricate conspiracy.³ The gradual march of the Anglo-Americans into settlements within the Provincias Internas in the southwest argued ill for Spanish claims to the Rio Grande basin, to the upper Arkansas and Red River valleys.⁴ These provinces held the last hope of Spain for the redemption of the region adjacent to Louisiana on the west which was the corridor⁵ into Santa Fé.

Spanish ambitions as well as diplomatic⁶ negotiations concerning colonial control had become apparently repressed during the 1812 War between the United States and England. Immediately, however, after the Battle of New Orleans the smoldering Royalist plotting in the New World began to rekindle. Ironically several of the "friends" and Royalist secret agents⁷ organized in New Orleans for the execution of the newly conceived strategy, were former revolutionists, heretofore sworn enemies of Spain. Indeed in the old Southwest the years 1815 and 1816 appeared a period of sudden reconciliations of former entrenched foes to His Catholic Majesty!

Onís, Minister of Spain, in Philadelphia, assisted by Intendent Ramírez and Captain-General Cienfuegos of Havana, Cuba, together with Juan Ruíz de Apodaca, Viceroy in City of Mexico, authorized and directed the Spanish plot to filibuster Anglo-American supremacy west of the Mississippi River.⁸ Pere Antoine, better known as Fray Antonio⁹ de Sedella, the refractory, powerful and popular Capuchin Rector at New Orleans, was the chief Royalist agent in New Orleans in both planning and executing the renewed secret

² *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23 (1940), José Alvarez De Toledo's *Reconciliation With Spain and Projects for Suppressing Rebellion in the Spanish Colonies*, translated and edited by Harris Gaylord Warren, p. 842.

³ Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁴ *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, S. Faye, *op. cit.*, p. 778.

⁵ *The Expedition of Lebulon Pike*. E. Coves, ed. (N. Y., 1895), vol. II, p. 522, and chapt. IV.

⁶ W. A. Goodspeed, *The Province and The States*, (Wisconsin, 1904), vol. II, p. 338; Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 45 & P. 50.

⁷ *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, Stanley Faye, *op. cit.*, 740, 741, 743, 755, 760; *Ibid.*, Warren, p. 827.

⁸ *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, Faye, *op. cit.*, pp. 766-767.

⁹ John Gilmary Shea, *History of the Catholic Church of the United States*, (N. Y., 1890), vol. III, pp. 357-390; *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, Faye, *op. cit.*, pp. 740-741, 769-770; Warren, *Ibid.*, pp. 827-828; Gayarré, *op. cit.*, vol. IV, pp. 154-155.

intrigues in the Gulf of Mexico colonies. One main objective was to hold the western border of the Louisiana Purchase as far east¹⁰ as possible. These beginnings of the veiled conspiring culminated unsuccessfully of course, in Spain's inevitable loss of both Florida and Texas.

After the interruption of the New Orleans campaign with the British loss at the Battle of New Orleans, Doctor Picornell, a former Independentist, resumed Spanish scheming in the southwestern provinces. This clever and active Royalist agent recognized the growing strength of the insurgents in Texas and the consequent urgent need of an informer more clever and better informed than he; someone who was in a position to give him advance information upon all future colonial insurrections. Thus armed, he could manage to keep from the Mexican revolutionists the port of Tampico which was the gateway to San Luis Potosí and rich silver mines. Also he could obtain in the Gulf both men and arms from enemy vessels by intercepting such shipments. Out of the desperate situation in which the loose ends of the republican hope of liberation were being brought together in Texas by both French and Anglo-American Independents, was born Picornell's magnificent choice for a Royalist super-spy. With inspired intuition and persistence, and with Pere Antoine as his only confidant, daring Doctor Picornell appealed to the sensational Machiavelli of the Gulf, Pierre Laffite, offering him complete amnesty of Pierre's mother-country, Spain. Pierre hesitated but nostalgia apparently conquered. One midnight of November, 1815, Pierre Laffite took a somewhat reluctant oath of allegiance to Spain in Fray Antonio's parsonage,¹¹—not however without mental reservations of his own. Within a year, in December, 1816, Toledo, arch insurgent leader in Texas, was to beg Spanish forgiveness and plead undying devotion to His Spanish Majesty; also he promised complete revelations of Napoleonic insurrections and personal espionage upon such contemplated colonies.¹²

In this formative dragnet of Spanish over-all counter-

¹⁰ Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹¹ *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, Faye, *op. cit.*, pp. 737-742.

¹² *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, Warren, *op. cit.*, pp. 826-863.

plotting, it is no mere coincidence that Jean Laffite a former avowed enemy of Spain but fanatically loyal to his ingenious brother, was also drawn into the clandestine roster of Royalist conspiracy. Unquestioningly he proceeded to execute Father Antonio's significant commission of espionage within the Arkansas country, accompanied by another recently accepted Spanish "friend," Major Latour, who was the most outstanding engineer and cartographer in New Orleans in 1816.¹³

III. DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

What transpired in the lower Mississippi valley west of the great river in the summer of 1816 to bolster the crumbling colonial empire of Spain can be followed in the exchange of documents from one Royalist to another, acknowledging and appraising the report of Major Latour. Latour's summation of his observation evidently did not reach Spanish headquarters in Mexico until July, 1817.¹ Pizzaro in Madrid in November, 1818, finally received a copy with a favorable commentary from Onís in Washington. The counter-criticisms of provincial emissaries acknowledge conditions therein stated but somewhat deprecated the significance of alarm expressed regarding the current situations. Their indifference suggests only tolerant interest and face-saving indulgence of blandishments of official decorum. The reports in part crystallized what everyone in Nueva España already suspected; it forewarned the inevitable United States Westward expansion and suggested counter-moves; it served definitely to place the Provincias Internas on the alert against aggression. Naturally some palliative measures of current expediency had been enforced, but with apathetic operation. In the meantime the Anglo-American peaceable infiltration of the old Southwest rolled steadily on toward the Rio Grande country.² This pioneer move had originally begun in the previous century through

¹³ *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, Faye, *op. cit.*, pp. 754-755.

¹ *Fatis to Viceroy* (Apodaca), New Orleans, July 26, 1817, Archivo General y Piblico de la Nación (Mexico, D. F.), Historia, Operaciones de Guerra, Notas Diplomaticas, vol. I, folios 84-86. (With this letter were transmitted several "copias", one of which was Latour's Memoir concerning Arkansas and the designs of the Americans.)

² See note, part II.

the Cumberland Pass.³ By 1816 it was spreading fanwise into the valleys of the Sabine, Trinity, and Brazos Rivers. The wagon-train trek was crossing Arkansas territory diagonally by the route later known as the Old Military Road. At its terminus, approximately today's Fulton, Arkansas, continued an extension,—a path into Texas called the Trammel's Trace⁴ after its Arkansas' hewer.

The 1816 survey as conducted by Jean Laffite and his confidential assistant Latour and written by the latter, represents one of the earliest activities of the Laffites in the plot to frustrate Anglo-American colonization in Texas. The excerpts in the quotations that follow only mildly suggest the Laffites' brilliant leadership,—somehow always slanted to their own interests.

To parallel Pope's story of the mining expedition to points above Arkansas Post, note particularly Latour's mention of his stay in the Cadron settlement and also the reference to the inaccessible hot springs of the Ouachita River and mountains.

Dated December 4, 1817: Vice-Consul Morphy's letter from New Orleans to the Captain-general in Cuba acknowledges the receipt of a memorandum from Friar Antonia de Sedella and J. M. Pipcornell. The first item of information is from the "newly" recommended one whom he does not yet identify as Pierre Laffite and concerns Aury and Mina in Galveston. The second, quoted below, came to Friar Antonio "por otra via,"—from another source (that is, from Jean Laffite and Latour.)

"... From another source we have learned positively that the Engineer Latour and Pedro Laffite's brother had been commissioned as follows: that, starting from the Ozark, or Arkansas, they should penetrate into the Internal Provinces (Texas, etc.) reconnoiter all those regions and draw up suitable maps; and that they had indeed done so, having reached a point 540 leagues within our territories and drawn up a great number of maps; in which commission they have been occupied eight months: . . ."

³ *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. IV, Mary Eakin Dawson, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-172.

⁴ Map of Arkansas, Morse and Breese, N. Y., 1844.

Morphy at New Orleans added his following comment to the above memorandum which he had quoted:

"... I had known that Pedro Laffite's brother had returned here last week after an absence of eight months; but today, following the report that has been given me by said Señores Padre Sedella and Picornell, I have been able to verify that indeed his journey, in company with the other, had been toward the west of the Internal Provinces; and it has been told me also that some maps were brought back."⁵

The vague phaseology of the above text is due to extreme initial caution of the current Spanish intrigue. Morphy was a very young man and only a temporary consul. In consequence the leaders of the Spanish "friends" gave him only niggardly information.

Prior to the aforesaid commission, Pierre Laffite had sent his brother, Jean, to Washington and Philadelphia to personally petition President Madison for payment of services rendered by the Baratarians against the British in the New Orleans campaign. While in Washington, Jean learned of Joseph Bonaparte's plan for a Napoleonic refugee colony. Also he heard rumors of a secret plan to incite a servile revolt in Cuba. His appeal for monetary payment for loyalty was unsuccessful, and he returned to New Orleans in March of 1816.⁶

After the quoted assignment, Latour under the assumed name of John Williams reported to the Intendent at Havana as the secret emissary of the New Orleans agents. He told first of the rumored servile revolt. "Informe de Mr. Latour," dated in Havana, March 26, 1817, relates:

"You will have seen in the note that my friends delivered to the Reverend Father Antonio de Sedella what they know relating to this matter. I was at that time in Philadelphia, and the same day on which No. 13 the younger learned of it he told me of it."⁷

To continue the confidential relation in part:

"Fifteen months ago, that is to say, in the middle of December, 1815, No. 13 the elder of his own volition and

⁵ Archiro General de Indias, Legajo 1900, t/s p. 66.

⁶ *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, Faye, *ob. cit.*, pp. 754-755.

⁷ *Archivos Historial Nacional*, Estado Legajo 5560, Expediente 6, folio 341.

uninfluenced by anyone offered to the Spanish Government by way of Padre Antonio de Sedella to help subject the insurgents of Mexico . . ."⁸

(Number 13 the younger and Number 13 the elder were the secret code aliases of Jean and Pierre Laffite, respectively.)⁹

The preceding vouchsafed information was followed by days of heel-cooling for Latour and exchange¹⁰ of notes by the Spanish officials. In the meantime Latour begged audience for his special report of espionage:

" . . . Since you have done me the honor to tell me the Government is unalarmed by what is happening currently and by what may be preparing against Mexico, I shall await on this matter your orders."¹¹

Havana, April 7, 1817: Ramírez, Intendente, transmitted to the Captain-General, Ciénfuegos, the memoir of Latour (as above) and wrote:

"Your Excellency. By special commission from Your Excellency I have held several conversations with the person who came from New Orleans recommended by Fray Antonio de Sedella and by Pierre and Jean Laffite, merchants of that city.

"That person presented himself to Your Excellency and signs himself with the English name of John Williams. Although he understands English and speaks it well I soon discovered that he is French and his real name is Lacarrière Latour, engineer by profession who served in France in the Civil works, or in the department of roads and bridges. In the years from 1813 to 1815 he was employed by the United States in their war with Great Britain, having served there as principal engineer of their Seventh Military District. Consequently he took part in the recent action in Louisiana and West Florida and wrote a treatise with the title of "Historical Memoir of that War," a book of 251 pages in quarto accompanied by a small and interesting atlas, printed in English in Philadelphia in 1816, which I have among

⁸ *A. H. N.*, Estado, Legajo 5560, Exp. 6, folio 354.

⁹ *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, Faye, *op. cit.*, p. 761.

¹⁰ Archivo General de Indias, Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 1878, *Fatio to Noels*, Aug. 31, 1817; *A. H. N.*, Estado, Lo. 5562, *José Ciénfuegos to Apodala*, April 29, 1817.

my books and which has enlightened me for those conferences. Beyond doubt he is an intelligent and well trained man, about 45 years of age and with all the vivacity and military appearance that the French Revolution has stamped upon all who took active part in it."

Latour's credentials to José Ciénfuegos, the Captain-General at Havana, included letters written by both the Laffites. Pierre's cleverly worded thoughts, hinting for officially authoritative sanction of their Spanish plots, are reflected in the following:

"New Orleans, February 26, 1817. General: We have the honor of sending to Your Excellency's presence, Mr. L. Latour, . . . and he is charged with giving Your Excellency every explanation that may be desired concerning matters of importance to our government. . . . He is informed of all our secrets . . . and receive from him such answers as you may seek regarding the important matters on which Pere Antoine has already reported to you.

". . . Your Excellency may be assured that the means we propose by word of Mr. Latour come as a result of long and profound reflection and from our perfect knowledge of the locality and of the individuals. If the least doubt remains in Your Excellency's mind you may remind yourself that during sometime past we have forewarned you of several imminent happenings that came to pass as we had foretold.

". . . the importance of the matter all demand that Your Excellency send an accredited person who shall hold Your Excellency's entire confidence and who shall have ample authority . . . We have the honor to be, etc., etc."¹³

A later testimonial to Latour's role as Spanish spy is disclosed in this letter from Onís to Pizarro, the Prime Minister in Madrid, Spain:

"Washington, November 22, 1818. El . . . Senor Intendente . . . commissioned a Frenchman named Latour . . . to introduce himself, pretending to be a friend, among the Revolutionary Frenchmen who shelter themselves in this country . . . This Frenchman, a man of ability . . . sent a

¹¹ *A. H. N.*, Estado, Lo. 5560, Exp. 6, folio 359.

¹² *A. H. N.*, Estado, Lo. 5560, Exp. 6, folio 360.

¹³ *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, Faye, *op. cit.*, p. 765.

memoir to the Intendente, well written, and although it contains nothing new which is not contained with greater exactness and with much earlier date, in the Ministry under Your Excellency's care by means of my (own) correspondence, for the Intendente and Captain-General of Havana it was very valuable, because it offered them a brief sketch of the Politics of this Country and the tricks that are adapted to carry (those Politics) into effect . . ."¹⁴

In Mexico, June 30, 1818, the Viceroy of New Spain, Don Jual Ruiz de Apodaca reported having received a translated copy of the exposition that John Williams had made about revolutionary projects of the Anglo-American Government; and he related the precautions he had ordered for avoiding a surprise revolt in New Mexico.¹⁵ He sent a copy of Latour's report to the Governor of Coahuila,¹⁶ the government of New Mexico,¹⁷ the Governor of Sonora,¹⁸ and also to the Commandant General of the Internal Provinces of the West in Santa Fé. November 30, 1818, Apodaca also forwarded to the "Minister of the State" (Prime Minister) a detailed report of the expedition sent out from Santa Fé because of John William's Expedition.¹⁹ From his superior ministers in Madrid, Spain, the Viceroy received an answer on April 25, 1819:

"Your Excellency. With Your Excellency's letter No. 107 of November 30, last has come the detailed report with voucher documents made up because of the exposition of John Williams the revolutionary projects of the Anglo-American Government and the invasions of New Mexico. This document, which is of the greatest importance, will be kept at hand for possible use; . . . God keep you . . ."²⁰

Latour's original report is addressed to Ramírez, Havana and is dated April 8, 1817. The following excerpts indicate both general and local highlights pertinent to the

¹⁴ Archiro General de Indias, Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 1898, p. 2.

¹⁵ A. H. N., Estado, Lo. 5562, Exp. 5.

¹⁶ A. H. N. Estado, Lo. 5562, Exp. 5, Monclova, Antonio Garcia de Texada to Apodaca, Nov. 3, 1817.

¹⁷ Ditto, Durango, Alexandro Gascia Condé to Apodaca, Sept. 28, 1818.

¹⁸ Ditto, Apodaca to Commandant General of Internal Provinces, April 6, 1818.

¹⁹ Archiro General de Indias, (Serille), Estado, Mexico, Legajo 13, typed transcript in Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, Apodaca to "Minister of State", June 30, 1818.

²⁰ A. H. N., Estado, Lo. 5562, Exp. 5, Spanish "Minister of State" to Apodaca, Madrid, Spain, April 25, 1819.

status of the Arkansas territory in relation both to the United States and to Spain. Arkansas' importance in 1816 as a developing frontier encroaching upon New Spain's Internal Provinces is clearly implied. Also it was stressed that the territory was the custodian of corridors to the southwest. Incidentally much consideration was given to possible prospective Spanish alliance with the resident Indian Tribes. Had the Royalist resident officials acted more vigorously and promptly to Latour's suggestions and predictions, the southwestern border of the United States might have become somewhat different.

"... You are well aware of the friendly disposition of most of the American people in favor of the insurgents of Mexico; so I omit speaking of it. These people feel pride in having given to the world an unheard of example of liberating themselves from the laws of a formidable Power. What they have done they wish other people to do in their turn, and because they (themselves) have been able to do it. (thanks to the help of Spain and France). They believe that all others can do and ought to do so.

"Supremacy over the future republics of the new world is what the Americans aspire to . . . What I am going to set forth I have either seen in the aforesaid places during a stay of ten months or have learned from persons of whose veracity I hold not the least doubt.

"Under pretext of reconnoitering the frontiers of its new acquisition (Louisiana), the American Government sent out in 1806 expeditions, one by the Colorado River of Natchitoches (Red River) commanded by Artillery Lieutenant Humphreys and the other by Captain Pike . . . but in reality it was to seek the mountain passes that might afford entrance from the plain of Santa Fé into Mexico, . . . and to succeed in gaining entrance into New Mexico under pretext of having stayed . . . in fine, to succeed in gathering useful information concerning this country. . . . this officer (Captain Pike) upon his return published a book accompani-

²¹ A. H. N., Estado, Legajo 5562, Expediente 5, pp. 245-273. The quotations which follow are taken from a translation completed by Stanley Faye in 1946 (personal communication). See translated and edited *Latour Report* in *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 30, (1947), by Edwin H. Carpenter; *Latour Report on Spanish American Relations in the Southwest*.

ed by maps, (and) I can assert from having inspected the same points that those (maps) of the Colorado, are in no wise correct; . . . and his book, although incorrect, offered nevertheless a great interest for the Americans. They fulfilled at last the purpose that they proposed, which was to call the public attention toward (that) region; and thus they brought about emigration toward the West and South. In this the American Government . . . got ahead of the Spanish Government in establishing forts on the aforesaid frontier. . . . The first author of this plan was Mr. Jefferson . . . Note in passing that, with intent to avert any suspicion of ambition, the American Government has not yet established any military (posts) west of the Mississippi between St. Louis and Natchitoches and likewise they have abandoned those several (posts) that existed in the time of the Spanish Government . . .

"To give an approximate idea of what it may come to be and of the enterprising spirit of these emigrants, I will state one fact, which, is, that on the Poto (Poteau) River and its neighborhood, situated 300 leagues from the detachment that is on the Arkansas and 350 leagues from Santa Fé, there were already settled in 1815 only 30 families; that last Autumn 50 others had joined them, and that in the following winter there were to come a great number from the interior of Tennessee, that is to say, from 550 leagues away. This emigration, so rapid and made from a country so distant, has as its origin the fame of the good quality of the soil. . . . The banks of the Arkansas River and likewise those of the rivers that flow into it and that were almost unpopulated ten years ago, are today proportionately more populous than the interior of New Mexico. I am sure of the truth of this. I was there at the time of annual Elections, and I saw the counting of the votes, which proves the population, but toward the lands along the Colorado River of the Natchitoches (Red) is where the Emigrants are settling principally.

"The lands farther up this river, which according to the opinion that I hold on limits ought to belong to Spain, are filled with numerous, continuous population, which I am sure will increase rapidly . . . The greater part of the Cherokee farmers, settled at Dosduail (Dardenelle) above the

Arkansas, and likewise many American families who have been living on the banks of the St. Francis and White Rivers, are preparing to transfer themselves thither. These lands are of the best quality. (It is) known from the first plantings that they have made that they are suitable for all kinds of cultivation, according to their respective situations above the level of the river: In the bottoms, sugar cane (and) indigo: more elevated, cotton, tobacco, maize, potatoes of the two sorts, and finally on the uplands grain of all kinds produce considerably. . . . In addition to the advantages of the soil they have that of taking as much land as they want without paying a penny and for which they would have to pay at least \$50 an acre if it were situated to the east of the Mississippi below what is called 'Congress Land.' . . . Adventurers . . . toward the Southwest . . . because climate and soil offer greater advantages than other regions, . . . The American Government . . . caused "Pre-emption Rights" to cease since the spring of 1816. . . . the Indian tribes are continually pushed toward the west . . . They have carried their complaints to the Government, which . . . has ordered all Territory of Missouri to evacuate settlements formed in the lands of the Indians, but those who occupy them are unwilling to abandon the fruit of their labor or their settlements already formed. . . .

" . . . the still numerous tribe of the Iroquois (Cherokee) who formerly lived wholly within the limits of the State of Tennessee and the Territory of Mississippi, whence about half have emigrated toward the West, first about the banks of St. Francis, later to those of the Arkansas, and at this very moment are planning to emigrate to those of the Colorado of Natchitoches (Red); . . . The Iroquois (Cherokee) have exchanged their primitive good faith for the vices, the astuteness and the bad faith of the Americans. They have learned from them the cultivation of the land, the way to spin cotton that they pick and to work it to the extent that today they find themselves in the position of having no need of traders for clothing themselves. Following their example they have indeed learned the use of fire arms and how to raise domestic animals. Also, they equal their teachers in the love of strong drink and that turbulent spirit that charac-

terizes in so particular a manner the inhabitants of the countries of the West of the United States.

"... Four-fifths of the products of beaver hunting are now in the power of the Americans, who during six months of the year occupy themselves in agriculture and during the rest of the year dedicate themselves to hunting . . . go up to the heads of the Colorado and Arkansas Rivers, . . . even penetrate as far as the plains of the Rio Grande. . . . trade carbines and ammunition for horses. . . .

"... those who have in prospect the undertaking of expeditions against Mexico can make them by three different ways; the upper waters of the Arkansas River, which they can go up with boats of 40 tons burden as far as the point where it ceases to be navigable, that is to say, at 8 days' journey from Santa Fé by the Colorado River and the 'red fort,' which are not more than 4 days distant from Taos, and lastly by way of the (wild horse) corrals on the Red River toward the South and the heads of the Sabine, Trinidad, Colorado and against the province of Texas and Coahuila; . . . consider that to the West of the Mississippi, from the upper limits of the State of Louisiana, the Colorado River (Red) and the hot springs of the Ouachita to the parallel of 35 degrees of latitude, which includes a part of the White River and all the Arkansas and thence westward as far as Mexico, scarcely was there 6 years ago a white population of two thousand souls and that last autumn that population was ten times greater and that therefore they asked the last session of Congress to divide the immense territory of Missouri and to cut off the southern part in order to form a new one under the name of Territory of the Arkansas; that for the purpose of contributing to aggrandizement of those countries, to aid in communication those inhabitants and those of the aforesaid States and to attract other emigrants, since last year the American government has maintained a postal route that passes by the town of Arkansas (Post), goes up to the district of the Cadron (settlement) which is 100 leagues distant, at this point crosses the Arkansas River and finally extends to Natchitoches by way of the Hot Springs of Ouachita, that in addition the Government has just ordered opened a Royal or Principal Road

(*"United States Road"*) from St. Louis to Natchitoches passing by the countries aforesaid; that likewise they have measured an arc of the meridian of 285 miles and $\frac{2}{3}$ from the Burnt Prairie above the Missouri to the Island of the Plums on the Arkansas River, this line forming the eastern boundary (present, and certainly temporary) of the Osages; that they are now surveying a million acres of land on the banks of the Arkansas and White Rivers for distribution among the soldiers who served during the last war; that these soldiers, in case of necessity, will provide a military force of which the Government can dispose at its pleasure; that a man who has several times travelled that Road offered to me last summer to guide me from the Cadron where I was then, in fifteen days and on horseback to the pass leading to the Rio Grande and that therefore an army would travel that road in a month of time; that the distance is less for going to the Province of Texas or to that of Coahuila; that, in fine, the distances, the shortest roads, the fordable places on the rivers, the best camping places for renewing the supply of provisions, etc., etc., are perfectly known to more than 200 inhabitants settled between the Colorado (Red) and the Arkansas River.

"... The time will come, ... when the Americans will overrun Mexico. This is inevitable. The Spanish Government cannot prevent this event, but at least it can defer the date (of it)....

"I beg you to forgive me if I take the liberty of meddling ... to set forth ... the means that seem to me suitable for alleviating (those dangers).

"The first means would be the definite and positive demarcation of boundaries between the Spanish and American possessions. ... The second means, ... is the establishment of Military posts on the defined boundaries. ... The third means, which I consider very easy, would be that of attracting all the old Creole inhabitants, for the most part poor men, of Ouachita, New Madrid, the Arkansas, White, St. Francis Rivers, etc., etc. All those people ... could be persuaded to emigrate if some concessions should be made to them. ... more and more they wish for the Spanish Government. ... With these good people might be formed

the center of population in the neighborhood of the Military advanced posts, . . .

(Signed) JOHN WILLIAMS.

“. . . Havana, April 8, 1818 . . . Senor Don Alexandro Ramirez . . .”

Thus the hearsay of Jean Laffite's command of a fabulous mine-hunt in the Arkansas country becomes, in truth, an authentic and significant secret mission of official Spanish espionage whose subversive motive was the constriction of the southwestern development of the United States. Simultaneously, the steadily plodding homesteading wagon-trains which moved diagonally along the path of the new “*United States Road*”—noted by these Royalist spies of 1816, Jean Laffite and Latour—found refuge, hospitality, and reinforcements on their way to the far southwest corner of the Louisiana Purchase. 'Twas the grim determination and hardy courage of these liberty loving homesteaders which in the end defeated the intricate Spanish campaign of intrigue against the southwest colonists, the conspiracy which was so dauntlessly abetted on land and sea after November of 1815 by the *Corsairs of the Gulf*, the brothers Pierre and and Jean Laffite.²²

²² *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, vol. 23, Stanley Faye, *op. cit.*, p. 741.