Zack Henry

Dr. Magee

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Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop

 The history of the Lafitte Brother’s blacksmith shop is full of piracy and smuggling, and some is believed to be only a myth. Myths such as that Jean Lafitte’s treasure are buried in everyone’s backyard. The Lafitte’s blacksmith shop was the home to two pirate brothers during the 1700’s by the names of Jean Lafitte and Pierre Lafitte. Pierre, the less known older brother, “was well known for his wit and charm, in addition to his handling of the sale of pirated goods. He also commanded artillery units. He died in 1821 near Dzilam de Bravo” (Wikipedia, 1). Jean, born 1776-1823 was the French pirate and privateer in the Gulf of Mexico. The Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop is located at the intersection of Bourbon Street and Saint Philip Street. The building was constructed “between 1722 and 1732 by Nicolas Touze” (Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop Bar, 1). The building was built out of cypress timbers, soft brick, and plaster. “The building escaped two great fires at the turn of the 19th Century, due to slate roofing” (Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop Bar, 1). These types of slates would be used by artists as canvases today. The old cottage is still to this day emblematic of the French Colonial architectural style of that time period.

The Lafitte brothers are important to Louisiana history because of what they did in the supposed “Blacksmith shop.” The building was not actually a blacksmith’s shop during the time; the Lafitte brothers used it as a front for their illegal business. “Many people in Louisiana wanted slaves, but several situations limited the supply, such as the embargo on importation of Africans into the United States. The Lafittes exploited the situation in order to become wealthy by providing slaves through illicit dealings when no one else could” (History Engine, 1). Some argue that the Lafitte brothers did not own the building, nor did they commit any pirating acts from the old blacksmith shop.

The Lafitte brother’s main headquarters for their smuggling operation was based in the Barataria Bay because of the Embargo Act of 1807. In 1810, the port was successful and the smuggling operation and piracy business took off for the two Lafitte brothers. In 1814, American authorities invaded the Barataria Bay and captured most of Jean Lafitte’s fleet he used to transport the slaves from Africa to Louisiana. General Andrew Jackson issued a pardon for Jean Lafitte forcing him to help defend New Orleans against the British in 1815. After their fighting against the British, “The Lafittes then became spies for the Spanish and moved to Galveston Island” (Wikipedia, 1).

To this date, the Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop still upholds its reputation for the oldest structure used as a bar in the United States. It is difficult to find hard evidence that the Lafitte brothers once owned the cottage at 941 Bourbon Street but, it is still “enlivened by the local legends of Pierre and Jean Lafitte and in turn has immortalized their legends in the region” ( History Engine, 1).

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