

## History 101

### Jean LaFitte



A more complex figure than last issue's *Blackbeard*, Jean LaFitte (spelled several different ways, was a New Orleans smuggler, pirate, and...patriot! Born in France but living in Louisiana, in 1810 he became the leader of a band of outlaws headquartered on an island in the Gulf of Mexico. With his brother, Pierre, he commanded a fleet of ships and raided both Spanish and neutral vessels in the Gulf. His ships flew the flags of Central and South American countries in revolt against Spain.

In 1813, the Louisiana governor offered a \$500 reward for LaFitte's capture. LaFitte then boldly offered a \$1500 award for the governor's head. All efforts to take and prosecute LaFitte failed. In 1814, the British, at war with the United States, offered LaFitte \$30,000, a pardon, and a naval captaincy if he would aid them in attacking New Orleans. He refused, told US officials, and offered the services of his Baratavia smugglers to the United States. Thus, he fought along side of General Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, receiving a pardon from President James Madison.

American forces had destroyed his headquarters at Baratavia, so LaFitte moved to Galveston Island. There, he established a town called Campeachy and returned to piracy. He made himself governor of the island. After he raided the Louisiana coast and scuttled an American ship, the United States sent an expedition after him in 1821 with orders to destroy the Galveston pirate colony.

LaFitte, who in spite of his swagger could be a gallant gentleman, quickly yielded, set fire to his own town, and sailed away. Most historians believe that he died either in Yucatan or in battle. [*World Book Encyclopedia, Vol. L, 1985, p. 30-31*].



Not surprisingly, perhaps, I don't have any other cover stats on LaFitte covers, but I currently have nine of my own—basically hotels and restaurants. And, of course, I'm always hoping to run across more. [*You might even start a Pirates collection!*]

