



Black John - the Bogus Pirate



Jean Lafitte was an infamous pirate who lived from 1780 to 1823. He and his brother Pierre started their lives of crime as smugglers in New Orleans until they were forced out by the US government and moved to Barataria Bay, Louisiana. When his ships and crews were captured, Lafitte used his diplomatic skills to bargain for their release with the American general (and later US President) Andrew Jackson in return for fighting with him in the War of Independence against the British at the Battle of New Orleans.

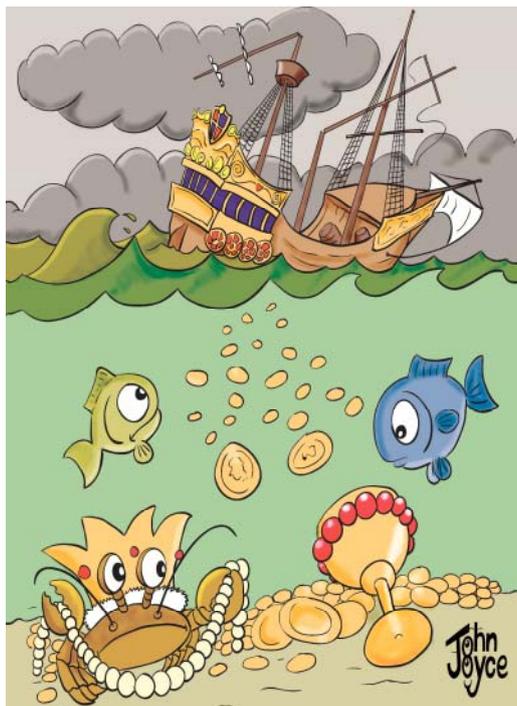
During his career, Jean Lafitte not only acted as a soldier, a sailor and a pirate, but also showed great ability to act as a businessman and criminal mastermind. He used these skills to set up an entire pirate colony called 'Campeche' on Galveston Island, off the shore of Texas. At its peak, this 'pirate city' contained some 120 separate buildings, housing an estimated two thousand people and earned around \$32 million a year (at today's value) from piracy. Lafitte's exploits raised so much anger amongst the local shipping community that the congressional delegation in Louisiana demanded the federal government do something about him. More US Navy ships were sent to the Gulf and in 1821 Lafitte's ship was ambushed. Lafitte was captured, but escaped to set up another base on the coast of Cuba, where he simply bribed the local government with a share of his plunder.

Jean Lafitte was killed in 1823 while trying to capture a number of heavily armed Spanish ships off the town of Omoa, Honduras. To this day, the city of Lake Charles, Louisiana holds an annual festival called 'Contraband Days' dedicated to Lafitte's exploits, and an entire nature reserve in the Louisiana Mississippi River Delta is named after him.

The Exploits of Jean Lafitte



Images & text - John Joyce



'Arrgh! Thar be treasure!'

The *Whydah Galley* was a passenger, cargo and slave ship captured by the pirate captain 'Black Sam' Bellamy, who used her for piracy along the coast of colonial America. On the 26th April 1717, she was caught in a violent storm and sank, leaving only nine survivors – two from the original pirate crew and seven prisoners who had been captured earlier that day.

The wreck remained hidden until 1984, when it was found buried under the seabed of Cape Cod in only four metres of water off the Bay of Massachusetts. It was authenticated by the discovery of its inscribed ship's bell and placard. Along with the wreck, 200,000 items were recovered, including 4.1 tons of gold and silver valued at around 400 MILLION U.S. dollars!

Along with the treasure recovered from the Spanish treasure ship *Our Lady of Atocha*, which sank in a hurricane off the Florida Keys in 1662, this makes the *Whydah Galley* discovery one of the largest treasure hauls (and certainly THE largest pirate haul!) ever recovered from the Ocean.

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