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# **Ghosts along the Texas Coast**

**Docia Schultz Williams**

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# Introduction

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As a small child, I shivered simultaneously with fear and delight as Halloween stories of goblins and ghosts were told to me. There's a fascination with the unknown, that other dimension where dwell the restive spirits of departed souls, that we all have in one degree or another. Perhaps you share with me the belief that there really are such things as "ghosts" or "spirits." Or perhaps you remain skeptical, totally unconvinced that there could be, or are, such things at all.

Because you personally have never experienced the seeing, hearing, or feeling of the presence of a ghost, you may obviously doubt there are such things. Having interviewed many people and corresponded with countless others, I am impressed by the intelligence and honesty displayed by those who have shared their stories with me so that I might bring them to you, my readers. Believe them or not, they deserve your respect and are not to be ridiculed. I for one, do not doubt their stories. Since my first book on the subject of ghosts, *Spirits of San Antonio and South Texas*, which I co-authored with Reneta Byrne was published in December 1991 (Republic of Texas Press, an imprint of Wordware Publishing, Inc.), I have made many radio and television appearances and have given numerous programs and book reviews. It is truly amazing how many people have contacted me after hearing me speak. They must recognize a "kindred spirit." Often I have been told, "I've never told anyone about this before; I was so afraid they would laugh at me." These people realize that I believe that there are such things as "spirits" or "ghosts," and they will have the ear of a sympathetic listener. I have heard some strange, yet believable stories as a consequence, and I have met many interesting people in the process.

Now, I am not a psychic. I have friends and acquaintances who are, and they have been of great help in explaining the "unexplainable" to me. And in consulting with these psychics I have learned that certain times and certain conditions contribute greatly to the sightings of apparitions, or the hearing of "ghostly noises." "Ghosts" or "spirits" seem to be the most common names associated with the unexplained presences that represent the restless souls of now dead human beings. They are, believe it or not, all around us. Some are kindly, benevolent guardians that protectively watch over someone or over a place they once loved. Others are very disturbed entities, not yet accepting that they are dead. These souls wander impatiently, often frightening us as they appear, disappear, and reappear, over and over again. You see, time means nothing to a ghost!

A common consensus seems to be that these spirits often come back to the place where they actually died, but this is not always the case. Sometimes they just come back to places where they were happy in life with someone they loved. The anniversaries of their deaths seem to call forth some spirits. And then, some ghosts seem to appear with great regularity at just a certain time of day or night. For instance, there might be a regular "6 p.m." ghost, or a "midnight spirit," or a "twilight specter." And, contrary to what one might think, many of them do appear in broad daylight. Some of them look just like a regular human being, while others are transparent, misty, or foggy in appearance. Generally they only appear for an instant and then completely disappear!

A full moon phase often draws out ghosts, and I've been told by psychics that they are generally more likely to appear during hot summer months than during cold weather. (Maybe they "hibernate" in the winter months!)

Some spirits guard hidden treasures or valuables, so the sighting of an apparition might possibly indicate that something of value may be hidden close by. And then, some of them just "hang around" for no particular reason at all!



This book contains stories of ghosts that have appeared in the coastal area of Texas, and it is the result of many months of researching. Most of the stories are well documented. A few are legend tales that have been told over and over again, sometimes for generations, and which often have several variations. I included a few of these that I felt worthy of repeating once more in the last chapter. Many of the stories appear for the first time in print. The setting for some of them centers around the coastal plains and low-lying marshes and woodlands that constitute the Texas Gulf Coast. The windswept beaches, offshore islands, and mysterious swamps bring forth tales of buried pirate treasure and adventurers such as the legendary buccaneer, Jean Lafitte. There are “big city” stories about Galveston, Corpus Christi, Brownsville, and the great metropolis of Houston. And there are tales centered around the Golden Triangle, which is comprised of Beaumont, Orange, and Port Arthur, and the area surrounding those cities. Historic landmarks, such as the Presidio of La Bahia at Goliad and the Old Lighthouse at Sabine Pass, are included as well.

Some of the stories are sweet and tender. Some of them are frightening. This is because ghosts have personalities just as mortals do. The character traits they had in life seem to follow them to the hereafter, so that kind and loving people probably return as watchful, benevolent spirits bent on protecting their loved ones. Mean-spirited, cruel, selfish and unkind mortals will doubtless return as fearful poltergeists, bent upon bringing horror into the lives of those who see or hear them. And then there are the pitiful, little lost souls who are just sad and unhappy, hanging around because they cannot seem to find peace on the “other side.”

And therein lies the mystique and the fascination of the entities we call “ghosts” . . . .

After reading the stories related in this book, perhaps the skeptics may still say, “Bah! Humbug about the tales contained within these covers. Or maybe, just maybe, they might decide that keeping a night-light on in the bedroom isn’t such a bad idea after all!

Docia Schultz Williams

# THERE ARE GHOSTS . . . . .

Docia Williams

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*From the sunburnt town of Brownsville,  
'Way down near Mexico . . .  
There are ghosts and roaming spirits  
Where 'ere you chance to go.  
They come back to roam the beaches  
And the farmers' sun-parched land.  
They're in the far flung reaches  
Where rolling waves meet sand.  
They're known to roam the islands  
And the marshlands by the sea.  
Their graves cannot contain them,  
For their souls roam wild and free.  
They're in Galveston and Houston,  
Port Arthur has a few;  
They're in dark and hidden places,  
And in hotel rooms with a view!  
Wherever men have worked and lived,  
Wherever men have died;  
Wherever women laughed or danced,  
Wherever they have cried;  
They're anywhere and everywhere,  
And forever they must roam.  
The Texas Coast . . . their cordial host,  
And the ageless land, their home.*



The Bolivar Island lighthouse on the Texas Gulf Coast

# Dedication

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This book is dedicated to my husband, Roy D. Williams, and my daughter and son-in-law, Sara and Dennis Thaxton, who have been my staunchest supporters, with my love and thanks.

# **Ghosts that Dwell in Coastal Towns and on the Windswept Beaches**

## GHOSTS . . .

---

*From the long and lonely outer reaches  
Of swampy lowlands and windswept beaches  
All along the Texas coast;  
There are legends, there are stories  
Of the tumults, and the glories,  
And of strange and eerie spirits known as ghosts.*

# Ghostly Guardians of Buried Treasure

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*Now, Jean Lafitte was a pirate bold,  
A pirate bold was he!  
He boarded ships and plundered gold  
From sea to shining sea.*

*Now buried on the Texas coast  
Just where, we've not a clue;  
His gold is guarded by his ghost,  
If what we've heard is true!*

Tales of buried pirate treasure and the ghostly guardians still standing watch over the ill-gotten booty of the buccaneers who raided shipping off the Texas coast have been around for many long years. By now, what is fact and what is fiction is a bit hard to sort out, as there are so many conflicting tales. However, most all the stories make mention of that most famous of pirates known to sail the waters off the Texas shores, the dashing swashbuckler Jean Lafitte.

Although the Encyclopedia Americana lists Lafitte as “American, Pirate and smuggler,” he was actually born in a small village on the Garonne River in France in the year 1780. Little seems to be known of his youth. At one time he was known to have been a privateer in the employ of Cartagena for the purpose of the destruction of British and Spanish commerce. He soon turned to piracy (where he could be his own boss!) and around 1809 he turned up in New Orleans, along with his brother, Pierre, and a stalwart band of followers of the same persuasion. Jean opened up a blacksmith shop in New Orleans that may have been a “front” for his real vocation, which was smuggling slaves into New Orleans. The hapless blacks were offered at \$1 a pound, and the Lafittes did a big business. At the same time, they supplied New Orleans’ citizenry with contraband goods, which they often sold from Grand Terre Island in the Baratavia Bay. From this locale, it was easy for the pirate band to plunder shipping in the Gulf of Mexico.

Jean was a handsome, dashing figure of a man, and he became a well-known personality in the gambling salons, quadron ballrooms, at the opera, and at theatrical productions in New Orleans.

The United States government eventually launched a number of expeditions against the Lafittes but they all failed. A revenue inspector who had been sent to examine their goods was murdered in 1814. Legal proceedings against them in United States courts had to be abandoned because John Grymes, the U.S. District Attorney, resigned his office in order to help the pirates! It seems Jean Lafitte’s whole career was built more or less on duplicity and double dealing. So successful was he in his various endeavors that he succeeded in transforming himself into a legend while he was still alive.

Now, Pierre was finally captured. During his captivity, Captain Nicholas Lockyer, of the British navy, offered Jean a captain’s commission, the sum of \$30,000, and pardon for all “past mistakes” if he and his followers would join the British expedition against New Orleans. While pretending to deal with Lockyer, Lafitte informed the American authorities of the British plans. The Louisiana authorities, with the exception of General Jacquez Villere and Governor William C. Claiborne, suspected a plot from the pirate, and they sent an expedition against Lafitte at Baratavia. Many of the pirate company were captured, but the Lafitte brothers escaped. Later on, they, and a number of the

followers, honorably served under General Andrew Jackson. In fact, Jean Lafitte assisted in the construction of the defenses of Barataria Bay. In command of a detachment of his pirate band, he participated most creditably in the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815. For his services, Lafitte and his men were granted full amnesty by President James Madison in 1815.

Even though the Lafittes were pardoned, they probably felt like their welcome had worn thin in Louisiana, because in 1817 they founded a "pirate commune" called "Campeche" (sometimes spelled "Campeachy") on Galveston Island, which was first called "Galvez-town" after Bernardo de Galvez, viceroy of Mexico. Jean Lafitte ruled over Campeche as "president," and in 1819 for a short time he was governor of "Galveston Republic." In the administration of his far-flung piratical empire, Jean made use of the islands off the coast of Texas. One of his bases was Culebra Island, composed of Matagorda and St. Joseph's, separated only by Cedar Bayou.

For the purpose of protecting commerce against depredations of freebooters and to safeguard the port of Caparo, the Spanish, and after them, the Mexicans, maintained the small fort of "Armazazu" on Live Oak Point. In retaliation, Lafitte maintained a fort of his own on the southwest part of St. Joseph's Island. The village of Aransas (now Aransas Pass) was later laid out near the site of the pirate's fort.

In 1821 the U.S. government, in reprisal of an attack on an American ship by a Lafitte follower, sent Lt. Lawrence Kearny to disrupt the community, although it was Spanish territory at that time. Lafitte is said to have burned Campeche and "disappeared." Actually, after being ousted from Galveston Island, many of the pirates just settled down in the coastal area. The final meeting of the great buccaneer and his men is reputed to have taken place at False Live Oak Point after they had been cornered by British and American navies. Here the booty was divided up and Lafitte supposedly cached most of it at False Live Oak Point in heavy chests, among the oak trees. This done, the pirates and his remaining followers attempted to slip through the American and British blockade. For three days and nights a cannonade was heard by the residents of Cedar Bayou, and Lafitte finally eluded his pursuers.

Later on, it is said that Lafitte conducted most of his activities on the "Spanish Main," which could have been just about anywhere in the Gulf of Mexico or the Caribbean. The famous pirate died of fever at Losbocas, on the north coast of Yucatan, about fifteen miles from Merida, in 1826. He was forty-six years old. He was buried in the "Campo de Santos" in the little Indian village of Silan.





Historical marker at Galveston

Now, there are lots of legends concerning Lafitte and his crew. Their latter-day haunts greatly resembled the Baratavia waterways they had known in Louisiana. They centered in the marshy Texas coastland below Beaumont and Port Arthur, and around the vast, brackish Sabine Lake, which empties into the Gulf of Mexico at dark-running Sabine Pass. These secretive waterways and marshes harbor stories of buried treasure and pirate ghosts to this day.

According to a story that appeared in the *Houston Post* many years ago, one of Jean Lafitte's ships was chased across Sabine Lake and made anchor in Port Neches at the mouth of the Neches River. To keep the treasure aboard the ship from falling into the hands of the Spanish pursuers, it was carried ashore and buried in a marsh. Maps purported to show where this treasure was secreted have appeared from time to time, and there has been much digging for it. It is supposed to have never been found. Maybe this is because it was never placed there. Lafitte's treasure simply can't be buried at every place it is said to be!

The late Thomas Penfield wrote a fascinating little book entitled *A Guide to Treasure in Texas*, published by Carson Enterprises, Inc. of Deming, New Mexico. Mr. Penfield really researched the Lafitte treasure locales, and while he didn't find the buried chests, he certainly told some good stories. I'll just bet one reason the treasure has not been discovered is because there are pirate ghosts out there doing a great job of guarding the burial sites!

In his book, *Ghost Stories of Texas*, the late Ed Syres, storyteller extraordinaire, tells us that Henry Yelvington, a notable forist, discovered the sunken outline of a low-slung schooner. It was the type often used by the Lafittes as a raider. This was in 1921, and the locale was in a lonely stretch of reefs and bayous flanking the narrows of Sabine Pass. From an old coastal dweller whose trapper forebear had settled Texas in 1833, Yelvington learned that the hulk was indeed one of Lafitte's ships. Indian

whose story was told to Yelvington, had seen the ship sunk under pursuing fire. They were unsure whether the crew drowned, or fled. Since we know that Jean Lafitte died in Mexico, we have to assume he was not on this particular ship, or else he managed to escape.

According to Syre's account, "of something else the Indians had been certain. For many years, the waters remained still, the land empty. Then one day, at the lone tree beside the sunken ship, an incredible figure appeared. Running Snake, the Attacapan chieftain, knew this man; he was Jean Lafitte, the chief of boats that had been driven away by the big ships; the man that Indians, fleeing southward, claimed to have seen dead and buried." (This statement probably refers to the inhabitant of the Indian village of Silan in the Yucatan Peninsula.) "And yet, there he stood, all alone; so with his braves, Running Snake approached, and in terrible shock, saw the figure vanish. After that, only from a distance would any Indian watch.

"But watch they did, for the figure returned and stationed himself where the waters hid the lone boat. The figure waited in the manner of one who would summon others, and knowledgeable of dark matters, Running Snake's braves were not overly surprised when a strange, shadowy boat slid noiselessly up the narrow waterway.

"From that boat emerged silent men, who, as though directed by their summoner, began to raise chests from the sunken vessel. Mutely they worked, loading their boat and then, with the dead Lafitte standing in their boat, they left as soundlessly as they had come.

"Where did they go? They started towards the big lake (Sabine Lake), then disappeared in a mist. After that, no one came again. Naturally, the braves of Running Snake thereafter avoided the place. Who could blame them?

Now, it's hard to tell whether Jean and Pierre Lafitte and their pirate crew spent more time plying the ocean deep in search of ships to plunder, or whether they spent more time ashore, digging holes in which to bury their ill-gotten goods, if we are to believe all the buried treasure stories that are often told. These stories run the gamut of the Texas coastline, from Cameron County, down near Brownsville, clear up to Jefferson County near the Louisiana border. Why the pirates didn't come back for their treasure is anybody's guess. Maybe they had poor memories, or maybe they partook of too much rum while out burying their loot. I'd buy the theory that the shifting sands on the windswept seashore caused the terrain to change in appearance sufficiently to make the burial spots unrecognizable. And, we must remember, the pirates more than likely buried their chests under cover of darkness as well. It would have been a real chore to find a certain spot among all the almost identical sand dunes and tufts of sea oats and marsh grasses that dot the coastline.

Conversations with psychics, and time spent reading and researching the subject of "ghosts" in general and "pirate ghosts" in particular, have brought out several interesting conclusions. Ghosts, which are the spirits of dead people who can't quite accept they are dead, do come back. In the case of Jean Lafitte and his pirate-followers, they return to guard the treasure they buried so long ago, and never got around to dividing up. But are they there just to protect their treasure? Might be they are there to lead a selected someone to the site of their buried treasure. Maybe this selected person would be someone with whom they could identify, a "kindred spirit" chosen to be the finder. Now, since there aren't any pirates out there robbing the big ocean freighters and tankers and cruise ships today, the Lafitte crew's spirits might have to identify with an airplane hijacker, since they have largely replaced the buccaneer!

For some unknown reason, there has always been a certain amount of romance and mystery attached to pirates. It must have something to do with all that buried gold, because they really were dastardly individuals. Boarding and looting and sinking ships was NOT a wholesome occupation!

Before we can begin to think about the ghostly guardians that protect the pirate treasure, we have

to have an idea of where the booty is buried.

Using Thomas Penfield's book *A Guide to Treasure in Texas*, we will come along on a make-believe trip along the Texas coast, county by county, from the southernmost portion, near Brownsville in Cameron County, where Penfield reported, "unconfirmed is the report that the pirate Jean Lafitte sank an unidentified Spanish galleon off South Padre Island in 1811 with a cargo of \$500,000 in gold and silver. One treasure writer speculates this may have been the Santa Maria, and the treasure was valued at around a million dollars." This event took place during the time the Lafittes were still operating from their Baratavia headquarters near New Orleans.

Moving on up along the coast, we come to Kenedy County, where it is noted that off the shore of Padre Island there is the wreck of the Spanish galleon *Capitana*. This ship was assigned to defend against some smaller Spanish vessels against a band of pirates. In a furious fight, the *Capitana* went down with all hands, and so did the treasure in her hull, said to be over \$1,000,000.

Moving eastward up the coast, we hit Kleberg County, where the famous King Ranch is located. There is a peninsula that juts out into Baffin Bay that is known as "Point of Rocks." A Lafitte treasure chest is said to have been buried there and the site marked by a copper spike driven into a crack in the rock.

Penfield reported there are three hills, called "Money Hills," on Mustang and Padre islands. The original Money Hill on Mustang was the highest sand dune, about three miles south of Aransas Pass. Because of the wind, the sand dunes shift a lot, and the highest dune one day might not be that way the next! Therefore, nobody knows where the original "Money Hill" was located. Sometimes it was called "Big Hill" or "Three Mile Hill" because of its location three miles south of Aransas Pass. According to local legend, a pirate ship blew ashore on northern Mustang Island, and the treasure from it was buried under "Money Hill" because it was a good landmark for the pirates to locate. Many coins have been picked up in this area over the years, so the main cache may already have been found.

The northern tip of Padre Island, located in Nueces County, abounds in buried pirate treasure stories. Penfield's guide states, "It is related over and over that Jean Lafitte's men frequented this area while the pirate leader was established on Galveston Island, and for years afterwards. Corpus Christi and the Laguna Madre, then, as now, were havens during the hurricane season. In 1835 the embankments and fortifications of a rendezvous were plainly visible on the north tip of Padre, and along the beaches were many posts yet standing with iron rings affixed to them, which had been used by the small boats that plied between Padre's shores and the larger vessels anchored offshore. There was a secret pass where the pirates could repair their ships, supply them with food and water, and divide their loot among themselves. All of these signs of Lafitte's presence on Padre Island have now disappeared."

When Lafitte was forced to quit Galveston Island, the remnants of his organization drifted down the coast to the many islands and coastal towns where they were safe from patrols. It was at this time that the legend was born that Lafitte had personally buried a vast fortune under a millstone on the northern tip of Padre Island. A printer from New Orleans named Newell spent a great part of his life searching and finally lost it, searching for this elusive treasure. No one ever learned just what information Newell had that made him so persistent in his search, but it was believed by some that he had befriended one of Lafitte's men while living in New Orleans and was told the secret of Lafitte's treasure in return for repayment. The markers sought by Newell were a single Spanish dagger (a type of yucca plant) and three silver spikes. He found hundreds of Spanish dagger plants but not a single silver spike. In 1837 Newell's small boat was found drifting in the Gulf, and a few days later his body was washed ashore.

In Calhoun County, where the ghost town and former seaport of Indianola was located, Penfield's treasure guide states: "A number of Texas treasure stories start with Jean Lafitte's inland flight as he

was pursued by a U.S. man-of-war. This was soon after he was ordered to leave Galveston Island. One story has it that he sailed into LaVaca Bay and, with the help of two men, buried treasure valued at a million dollars at the mouth of the LaVaca River, across the bay from the town of Port LaVaca. It is said that a long brass rod was driven into the ground directly above the treasure and left emerging to indicate the treasure site.

“One of the pirates who helped to bury this treasure is said to have told of the incident on his deathbed in New Orleans, giving rough directions to the treasure. This story was heard by a man named Hill, who eventually bought the ranch on which the brass rod was believed to be located. One day a man out herding cattle for Hill noticed the rod and pulled it from the ground, not realizing its significance, and he took the rod with him that night. When Hill saw the rod he recognized its meaning at once, but the old cowhand could not retrace his steps to the place where he had found it. Hill is said to have searched for years for the Lafitte hoard, but he never found it.

“Rumors of a pirate ship wrecked at the mouth of the St. Bernard River in Brazoria County have persisted for more than a century. It is said that the ship put into the river about 1816 to escape a hurricane. Before the vessel was destroyed by the storm, the crew took ashore and buried a treasure estimated at ten million dollars. When the storm was over, only one of the pirates remained alive. He is said to have settled down as a fisherman on Matagorda Island, and frequently displayed gold coins. He admitted to having been a member of the ill-fated ship’s crew, but insisted that he had not participated in the burial of the treasure, and therefore knew only generally where it was hidden. In support of this story, it is said that Indians living in the area told early settlers of seeing the wreckage of a great ship after a storm had passed.

“The village of Liverpool, located on Chocolate Bayou in eastern Brazoria County, has all but ceased to exist,” according to Penfield. He states, “A man named Campbell came here in 1821 and settled on a branch of Chocolate Bayou that eventually became known as Campbell’s Bayou. Before long he was joined by another strange character who was known only as Capt. Snyder. It was believed that both men had been involved in piratical ventures with Jean Lafitte, and as neither had any visible means of support but always seemed to have plenty of money, it was rumored that they kept money buried around their places. When Campbell died, Capt. Snyder shortly afterwards disappeared, never to be seen in the area again. It was said that Campbell’s widow knew where some of the supposed treasure was buried, but not the main cache.”

Now, speaking of treasure believed hidden in Brazoria County, the folklorist and writer Catherine Munson Foster, in her *Ghosts Along the Brazos*, talked about a treasure chest found near old Velasco (now called Surfside). The story was given to Munson by L. Claude Shannon, and by Sybil Anderson, son and granddaughter, respectively, of Mrs. Georgiana Shannon. Mrs. Shannon’s unpublished memoirs had included a story as told by an old Negro man named Jeff, whose word everyone in those parts took to be reliable. It seems a couple of men came to Velasco and seemed to be searching for something between San Luis Pass and the Brazos River. The strangers, who were camping, had nothing at all to do with the locals.

They hired Jeff to accompany them to a certain place among the sand dunes one moonlit night, and there set him to digging in the sand. After he had dug a deep hole, his shovel hit a very large chest which was buried there. It was so heavy it took all three men to lift it out with ropes.

When they had brought the chest to the surface, one of the men shouted in triumph, and at just that moment, a huge hand reached up and grabbed the chest, drawing it out of sight. Jeff, who later told of the event, said he was so frightened he ran away! Jeff would never tell where the place was where the chest was buried, but he did swear the story he told was true. When asked to tell more about it, he refused, saying, “It was the devil.”

Nobody ever saw the two strangers after the “devil’s night,” either, and while there were many searchers out looking for the place, no one ever found it.

As might be expected, since Lafitte and his pirate followers lived on Galveston Island for a time, there are many stories of buried treasure connected with that area. Penfield’s book cites a number of pirate treasure locations around Galveston. It’s said that there may be as much as \$27,000,000 of pirate’s treasure on Pelican Island, whose 4,000 acres are used largely by industry, including ship repair facilities. The small island is connected with Galveston by a causeway.

Then, Penfield mentions that Dr. James Long of Natchez, Mississippi, who was among the last of the Texas filibusterers, led two expeditions into Texas in 1819 and 1821. For a time, he and 200 followers lived on Bolivar Point at the southern tip of Bolivar Peninsula, opposite Lafitte’s fort on Galveston Island. While Lafitte was robbing Spanish ships in the Gulf, Long and his forces seized one of the pirate’s small boats which had been left in the harbor at Galveston. Long described this action in a letter he mailed to General E.W. Ripley in Louisiana in 1820. He also mentioned that “some men of Mescatee” (referring to Lafitte’s men) knew of \$130,000 buried nearby. It is believed that Long had planned to recover this money, but he was killed before he could get around to finding it. It is believed this little known treasure has never been located.

Almost directly across from Galveston, on the mainland side of West Bay, there’s a place called Virginia Point. In 1929 a Beaumont newspaper published a “Forty Years Ago” item in which it quoted the *Galveston Civilian* as saying that a hurricane in 1818 had driven several of Jean Lafitte’s ships ashore on Virginia Point. The item went on to say that several years later some guns were found on Virginia Point whose muzzles had been stuffed with gold coins, presumably from the wrecked ships. It was said that the finding of the guns had long been kept secret in hopes that more treasure might be located. The story of Lafitte’s treasure at Virginia Point persists in legend, but Penfield said there’s scarcely a point between New Orleans and Corpus Christi that doesn’t have its own legend of buried Lafitte treasure!

Harris County is home to La Porte, in Trinity Bay. Lafitte is said to have sailed a ship into La Porte and taken a treasure chest ashore, where it was buried. Lafitte was accompanied by two trusted lieutenants, who helped carry the chest inland a short distance. Lafitte is said to have returned to his ship alone. Supposedly, the lieutenants were blindfolded as the treasure was buried, but Lafitte said one lifted his blindfold to note the location of the buried chest. In a rage of anger, the pirate chief killed both of the men. They say the treasure chest lies under an old house which was built over it without the owner’s knowledge of the treasure’s being there.

Another place where Lafitte sometimes anchored his ships was called Seabrook, on Galveston Bay (still in Harris County). It’s said the pirate buried treasure near three large trees on the banks of the Lone Oak Bayou. The belief stems from reports that early settlers in the area found strange markings on some of the trees along the Bayou.

Just north of Galveston, we come to Chambers County. The small historic town of Anahuac is situated on Galveston Bay opposite the mouth of the Trinity River. It was well known to Jean Lafitte. About 1900 several doubloons dated 1803 were found on the banks of the bay near Anahuac. For years it has been known to residents that a strange ship, partially submerged in the sands of the inlet, could be seen on clear days. No one thought much about it until 1940, when a man sought permission from the state to salvage the wreck. When denied permission, he explained that this was one of Jean Lafitte’s ships, wrecked when the pirate was forced to leave Galveston. It was a secret, he said, that his family had kept for 90 years. He claimed to have proof that this particular vessel had carried the major portion of Lafitte’s vast treasure, a sum estimated at more than \$12,000,000. It is little wonder nobody paid much attention to the treasure seeker, because all up and down the Texas coast, Lafitte

treasure stories are a “dime a dozen,” according to Tom Penfield.

An even wilder story concerning Lafitte’s treasure ships also comes from Chambers County. According to Penfield’s book, when Jean Lafitte was ordered to leave Galveston and his “Campeachy” domain, he is supposed to have loaded up his flagship, the *Pride*, with five bearskins of gold and sailed somewhere into the back reaches of Galveston Bay to bury them. The ship ran aground and developed such a leak that it settled to the muddy bottom of a small lake before the treasure could be removed and buried. Well, in 1833 the hulk of a sunken ship was located in Lake Miller, near the community of Wallisville. It was hidden just below the surface of the murky water in about eight feet of quicksand-like mud. By means of using a long pipe as a probe, a party of treasure seekers was able to determine the outline of the hulk, and the measurements fit those of the *Pride*. A man named John Lafitte showed up and claimed the treasure, if any was found, on the basis he was a “direct descendant” of the famous pirate. However, the search had to be called off because the state-owned lake had not been properly leased, and the searchers were ordered to leave. This section of Lake Miller has now been filled in. The *Pride*, and the treasure, if indeed they exist, are under dry ground today.

Sabine Pass, over in Jefferson County near the Louisiana border, was a thriving village in the day when Lafitte and his pirates roamed the Gulf Coast. Tales of buried treasure abound in this area. According to a story that appeared in the *Houston Post* many years ago, one of Lafitte’s ships was chased across Sabine Lake and anchored in Port Neches at the mouth of the Neches River. To prevent the treasure aboard the vessel from falling into the hands of Spanish pursuers, it was carried ashore and buried in a marsh. Maps purported to show where this treasure was secreted have appeared from time to time and there has been much digging for it, according to Penfield in his Texas treasure guide. It is supposed to have never been found, but maybe, just maybe, an article that ran in the *Port Arthur News* on October 28, 1984, will shed some light on this tale. The writer, Denny Angelle, related the story of a man named Marion Meredith. It seems many years ago Meredith told a Houston newspaper reporter about a neighbor of his who had bought a map from an old Mexican woman. It was supposedly a pirate’s treasure map. Now Meredith lived over near Port Neches, and the buried loot was supposed to be somewhere near the mouth of the Neches River, not far from his home. Her pirates led by Jean Lafitte were said to have escaped their pursuers into the shallow waters of Lake Sabine. This one particular ship, bearing a fortune in treasure, was supposedly floated into the headwaters of the Neches where the crew cut the anchor chain, leaving the anchor as a marker. The treasure is supposed to have been buried in the marshy land nearby.

Well, Meredith’s neighbor found the rusty old anchor and located the spot where the treasure should be. Naturally, he began to dig! But before he got too deep, something unseen and icy gripped him! The man was seized with such a nameless horror that he fled the place. So terrified was he that he lost his voice entirely, and he is said to have died a few days later, without ever speaking a word to anyone!

Meredith later obtained the map, but he decided he wouldn’t undertake the treasure search alone. He enlisted the help of a man known only as “Clawson,” a crusty old woodsman with a bit of pioneer salt throbbing in his blood.

The two men set out down the Neches River and, following the map, they soon discovered the ancient, rusty chain. Pointed in a certain direction by the chart, they searched for a tree with a head cut into its bark, as was noted on the map. Sure enough, they found it with no difficulty.

From the marked tree, Meredith and Clawson paced off a certain distance and soon found themselves high and dry on a small island in the marsh. They found the tools that Meredith’s unfortunate neighbor had left behind him, and the hole that he had begun to dig. Meredith grabbed his pickax and eagerly started to dig. It wasn’t long before he found a human skeleton, still wearing

rotting clothing and boots. Meredith and Clawson put the skeletal remains aside, and Clawson jumped into the hole in order to dig deeper. Suddenly, he leapt from the hole, his eyes wild in a face as white as a sheet. "For God's sake, man, let's get out of here," he told Meredith. Meredith didn't understand, but Clawson begged him to go, saying, "I've just seen hell and all its horrors! We have to leave this place."

The two men fled, leaving their digging tools on the little island.

Several years later, Meredith ran into Clawson in Beaumont. He recalled the day that they had gone digging to Clawson. The man never would reveal to Meredith what he had seen, but he did tell him that "that day" had haunted him every day of his life since then! It truly had to have been a horrifying experience!

Meredith later returned to the spot to retrieve his tools, but taking Clawson at his word, he did not attempt to dig again. Instead, he carefully reburied the skeleton, then hid the map away and never again went near the little island at the mouth of the Neches.

Once, when some young men approached Meredith and asked him to lead them to his "treasure island," he told them, "I'll take you out there, and I'll even watch you boys, but there ain't enough money in Texas to get me to dig that damned hole."

Nobody knows what became of Marion Meredith. It was a long time ago. Maybe he finally learned the secret of just what is guarding that pirate treasure, or maybe he really didn't want to know what that dreadful unknown thing was that his friend Clawson saw and described as the "dark side of hell." He was probably content to just let well enough alone. No doubt the treasure is probably still out there.

There is, without a doubt, a lot of buried or sunken treasure scattered all along the Gulf Coast area of Texas. Maybe someday some of it will be found, since now there are metal detectors and other devices that can aid in such searches. I learned in speaking with Dr. Joe Graham, of the Department of Sociology at Texas A&M in Kingsville, that "ghost lights" are said to shine around an area where treasure is buried, also. He said this belief is especially widespread among the Hispanic population in South Texas.

From time to time somebody finds a doubloon from a wrecked ship. An occasional gold coin will turn up in a sand dune somewhere, proof that there is still some gold out there. Whether or not there are pirate guardian ghosts at all those purported treasure sites, we have no way of knowing. Since we haven't seen any publicity about pirate treasure being discovered, we're reasonably sure that there are a few "sentries" on duty. After all, it was tough work, dragging those treasure chests ashore and digging those deep holes in which to bury them. We can't blame the pirate-specters for not wanting to give up their loot! They must still be out there, patrolling the beaches, guarding their treasure, so that neither you, nor I, nor even the IRS will discover their secret hiding places!

*The pirates' gold is still around  
The legends will not die.  
In holes dug deep within the ground,  
Their treasure chests still lie.*

# The Three-Master

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I am indebted to Yolanda Gonzalez, librarian at the Arnulfo L. Oliviera Memorial Library at the University of Texas at Brownsville, for sending me this story. It was told by a fisherman, John Garreau, on Padre Island's levees to a group of fishermen in 1967, in the presence of Peter Gawend who wrote it all down. Later the story appeared in *Studies in Brownsville History*, edited by Mike Kearney.

“When the full moon lights up the sky, when the Gulf is choppy, and when shreds of clouds chase each other through the sky, it is possible to become witness of a beautiful but ghostly sight.

“Several times in the past century, fishermen would return from the Gulf with the following story

Usually at a distance between two to three miles off the coast, straight to the east of the entrance to the former port of Brazos de Santiago (close to today's Port Isabel), a strange object would appear from the direction of the Rio Grande's mouth, moving swiftly towards the open sea. It would seem to be very large and high, and the absence of any noise would make the vision very mysterious. It would move as if pushed or carried through the water. No living soul would be seen. Then, when it would come close, one could clearly recognize a three-master, or French corsair, with every sail set. All the cannon hatches would stand open. The ship would be loaded so heavily that the choppy sea could not influence its course. At one time, the fisherman said, a lieutenant with the U.S. Army from the former Fort Texas saw that spectacle and described the scene to him, saying, “. . . on it went, glacial white, mountain high, deathly still, a spectral, gliding glory of moonlit space . . . it passed, vanished, and made no sign . . .” Whose ship it was, nobody knows. Some people say it carried Jean Lafitte's ghost to the place where he had buried his (never-found) treasures. Other people who saw the ship insisted that it was a Spanish galleon having three masts. It is very possible that it was returning to the area where it was sunk by a storm centuries ago, or that it really did carry some soul's ghost that was not able to find its rest.



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