



**BY GHENI PLATENBURG
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French pirate Jean Lafitte was known for his ability to amass a wealth of treasures in the Gulf of Mexico. So it comes as no surprise that the Victoria-area hotel that used to share his namesake has fittingly become a popular treasure of the Crossroads.

Situated along the Guadalupe River, the picturesque, three-story white building is rich in historical value. "We tried to save a lot of history out here for future generations," said Judy Clegg, who along with her husband of 45 years, John Clegg, owns the hotel. "If these walls could talk, they could tell us lots of stories."

Built in 1909, the Lafitte Hotel was a landmark on Seadrift's Bay Avenue. The hotel was originally built to be a railroad hotel, but the railroad never happened. Despite the lack of a railway, the Lafitte still attracted many guests including newlyweds, traveling salesmen, Calhoun County judges and possibly even the infamous outlaws Bonnie Elizabeth Parker and Clyde Chestnut Barrow.

The hotel closed in the late 1970s, later becoming a school for preschoolers and then a bed and breakfast until it was nearly destroyed in a September 2005 fire.

When Judy heard of the former owners' intention to tear down the submerge, which had lost its third floor and

received heavy smoke and water damage, she persuaded them to sell it to her for \$1 if she promised to move it off the property.

"We still had to move it so, needless to say, it cost a little more than a \$1," Judy joked. "I couldn't stand the thought of tearing it down."

Judy said she was motivated to buy the Lafitte because of her interest in all things old, particularly hotels.

The Cleggs, who own a business that routinely moves structures, took on the challenge of moving the structure piece by piece from Seadrift to their home ranch, Espiritu Santo.



When the Lafitte Hotel in Seadrift, which was originally built in 1909, caught fire in 2005 the owners were going to tear it down and build a house on the property. Instead, Judy Clegg and her husband John Clegg bought the hotel for \$1 and moved the entire historic building to their ranch in Mission Valley and began restoring it to its former glory. ANGELI WRIGHT/AWRIGHT@VICAD.COM

IF YOU GO

What: Spirit Inn of Mission Valley

Where: 3377 Lower Mission Valley Road

Other: For general questions about the Spirit Inn of Mission Valley, contact Natalie McLarty at natalie@mcdtrailers.com or call her at 361-649-1788.

RIVER TRAILS
Approx. 1/2 mile to the right

The Spirit Inn of Mission Valley is located on the banks of the Guadalupe River. The hotel is primarily used for weddings and special functions such as retreats. ANGELI WRIGHT/AWRIGHT@VICAD.COM

It took the couple about six years to fully rebuild, restore and decorate the property, which they renamed the Spirit Inn of Mission Valley.

The inn has 10 bedrooms and two penthouse-style suites – The Lafitte Suite and The Spirit Suite – on the third floor.

Bonnie and Clyde are rumored to have stayed on the second floor in room number 8, a corner room that would have provided them a clear view of Bay Street and any sign of trouble, said Judy.

"It's a very interesting place for anyone interested in historic structures," said John. "It's one of the oldest examples of a South Texas hotel."

The Cleggs tried to keep much of the hotel's original features, including its longleaf pine floors and walls and its striking, brick fireplace.

Since opening to the public in 2010, the inn has hosted weddings, company retreats, family reunions, conferences and even the Bach Festival.

Beginning in August, the Cleggs plan to expand the inn's repertoire by offering a weekends-only bed and breakfast.

Guests of the inn can go fishing in the river, walk alongside the river banks, observe nature and even explore remnants of the ranch's rich history.

Espiritu Santo is the oldest cattle ranch in Texas.

On the property, are the ruins of the ranch's Spanish mission that was built in 1729 as well as part of the El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail.

About the only things not provided to guests are electronic amenities such as television sets, game consoles or computers.

"I want people to come out here and get away from things. I think people are too connected sometimes," said Judy. "It's a place to come and relax." 

