A (Craw) Fish Tale

Many, many years ago, on the banks of the Bayou Teche at Pont Breaux, La., a little Acadian boy named Narcisse Thibodeaux went on a fishing trip with his father.

After hauling in a goodly mess of catfish, the father started a fish stew or courbouillon going, and the little boy just sat on the bayou bank, happily dangling his feet in the water until a big crawfish bit him on his big toe, and little Narcisse let out a yelp and jerked his foot back, flinging the hungry crustacean in an arc and into the pot where, unnoticed, it bubbled merrily away with the fish.

But, come dinner time little Narcisse spied the Intruder, cooked fiery red by now, and fearing that PaPa would get angry and perhaps apply a heavy hand if he discovered this desecration, little Narcisse popped the juicy mudbug in his mouth . . . and grinned with delight.

This was indeed a delicious find!

Thus, according to Acadian storyteller Woodrow Marshall, was the first crawfish eaten. And for many generations the wonder of this little creature, which looks like nothing more nor less than a miniature lobster, remained exclusively with the Acadians of the area near Pont Breaux, or Breaux Bridge, The Crawfish Capital of the World.

There, restaurants during the spring crawfish season sold "crawfish dinners" which would include a crawfish cocktail, crawfish patties, crawfish bisque, crawfish etouffe (a stew over rice), stuffed crawfish and anything else their agile minds could invent. Local caterers specialized in spicy, stuffed crawfish heads for cocktail parties—and every cook or housewife worth the salt had an exclusive recipe for the bisque, utilizing scrubbed and stuffed heads as the "piece de resistance."

Called variously "mudbugs," "crawdads," "crawfish" in various sectors of the country, the crawfish thrives in the Louisiana swamps, on and in river banks and bottoms, in rice fields and other areas which are periodically flooded, then drained or drop drastically so that the crawfish can burrow into the mud and have little crawfish with great fervor.

They are harvested usually from December or January up into late April or even well into May. In recent years, with the aid and advice of the Louisiana Agricultural Extension Service and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service, crawfish culture has become a significant industry in the area, with crawfish "farms" producing millions of the succulent little crustaceans annually, and rice farmers reaping a rich "lagniappe" or extra dividend by introducing the crawfish to their fields and harvesting them during the flooding season. Harvesting, of course, consists of netting.

Freezing, too, has been a tremen

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