Bayou cookery: Nothing like it anywhere else on earth

Perhaps in no other place on earth is food and the gustatory consumption thereof of the honored institution it is in Louisiana's bayou country. Here, a kind of bayou cooking, called "mudbug" (also spelled "crayfish"), that King Crustacean so lovingly prepared with utmost reverence and finesse by the cooks who maintain the bon vivant gustatory consumption there-

bayou cooking, Acadian and Creole cu-

ling Crustacean so lovingly prepared with utmost rever-

ence and finesse by the cooks who maintain the bon vivant tradition long associated with the Acadian and Creole cuisine of south Louisiana.

In distinguishing between Acadian and Creole cookery, one might say that Acadian dishes are luster, the cooking hand a bit heavier.

The Acadian approach to ingredients and to preparation was developed, by necessity at first, perhaps, with more flexi-

tivity but certainly with no less care.

Acadians are more likely to combine all ingredients in one pot, such as the jambalaya, than the Creoles. The Creoles would cook their fish, for example, separately with herbs and otherwise, and the sauce would be poured over it afterward.

Creole recipes evolved more directly from European recipes because the French and Spanish aristocrats who settled New Orleans were fresh from the Old World, more urban in their taste and demands, and many brought their personal expert chefs along with them to the New World.

Though imported goods were not easily come by, whatever was obtainable was more diverse and accessible to the Creole cooks of New Orleans than to the French Acadians in more rural areas away from the city.

The latter made do with what nature made available in the bayous, and "making do" was certainly not difficult with the abundance of fish, game, herbs and vegetables offered by the almost year-round growing seasons.

Like a gently caressing mother, chefs were able to transform such foodstuffs as native rice, yams, pecans, oranges, a greater variety of freshwater and saltwater fish as well as shellfish—shrimp, oysters, crabs—-the Louisiana cook, wild turkey and ducks, beef, poultry, frogs, turtle, pork, homemade sausage, corn, mirliton (vegetable pear), crawfish (squirrel), divers beans, tomatoes, okra, all in- to sumptuous delicacies whose flavors would tickle the taste buds.

By adding the basic ingredi-

ts, bouquets des herbes, or a dash of spices, a splash of brandy or rum, or by cooking with a roux, early Louisi-

ana cooks were able to ad lib genius, and the results were compellingly savory.

Today, this flair for flexi-

tivity and ingenuity is still evi-

dent in the splendid culinary triumphs to be found throughout Louisiana's Aca-

dian country.

And her Queen City, New Orleans, is certainly renowned for superb cuisine and excellent restaurants.

Rice is the standing dish for every Creole or Acadian table, and is served at least once a week, sometimes twice or thrice, each day. A Louisiana cook assumes as much rice in one year as any other American eats in five.

It is eaten in jambalaya or gumbo; with red beans (red beans and rice, a pleasant repast, is one of most common and popular dishes of the region).

Simple as it sounds, the beans cooked slowly with a roux and onions, garlic, hot seasonings, and sausage, then poured over and mixed with cooking rice, provide a delectable entrée that is absolutely soul-satisfying; in rice cakes, or rice au lait for dessert, or simply with gravy, but never ever as a cereal with milk and sugar for breakfast.

Gumbo probably most nearly characterizes the distinctive cuisine of the area for most people, but those who find it more substance might think of jambalaya, etouffée, or their favorite fish dish.

Boiled crawfish is a delicious thick soup, spiced and seasoned and full of the head shells stuffed with a dressing of crawfish meat, bread, onions, celery and peppery herbs, also served over rice. Crawfish billets are in great demand, especially during the season, because they're a perfect go-with beer.

Louisiana has harvest festivals which take note of most of the major crops, or fish.