Our Acadian heritage and cuisine is very unique. Part of that heritage is the way we prepare our meals and what goes into them. Gumbo, jambalaya, and stew are all a part of that cuisine.

But where would those dishes be without one major ingredient - rice? And where better to get that rice than from a rice mill right here in New Iberia?

The Conrad Rice Mill on Ann Street is the oldest operational mill in the United States, and it was even placed on the National Register of Historical Places in 1975.

First built by P.A. Conrad in 1912, the mill has been processing rice for 74 years.

In those earlier days, the field workers would cut the rice at harvest. Then they would lay it on levees to sun-dry. Once dry, the rice would be put in 162 pound sacks. The rice was then brought to the mill for processing, put in 100 pound sacks, then brought to the public docks near Main Street in New Iberia.

It was then put on riverboats and sent to New Orleans to be sold.

Thanks to modern machinery and transportation, the process of milling rice and getting it to the consumer is far easier today than it used to be. Instead of using paper bags and sacks, the rice is now bagged in clear, plastic bags and trucks, instead of riverboats are now used to transfer the rice to the market.

Until 1975, when Mike Davis took over the mill, white rice was all the mill produced. When he took over, Mr. Davis changed the name of the mill from the Conrad Milling and Planting company to the Conrad Rice Mill (KON-RI-KO), and made many changes during the course of 11 years.

Now, not only does the mill bag rice from 7 ounces to 100 pounds, but it also has many other products. These products include: Wild Pecan Rice, Brown Rice, Creole Seasoning, Rice Cakes, and various specialty mixes which include: gumbo, artichoke, and rice dressing, to name a few. And in 8 to 10 weeks, two brand new products will be sold under the KONRIKO label. These are: KONRIKO All Natural Breading Crumbs and KONRIKO "Cajun" Style Crawfish, Shrimp, and Crab Boil.

While the white rice is shipped only within the state of Louisiana, the specialty mixes are sold all over the United States, Canada, and Bermuda.

The KONRIKO Company Store

When Mike Davis took over the rice mill in 1975, he knew that what he had was special and unique among all other rice mills in the United States.

He had a dream to build a tourist reception center where tourists could come and be made to feel welcome, and also learn about the Cajun Heritage. His idea was to make the building similar to an old country store from the early 20th Century. He did a lot of research, and with the help of an architect, came up with the blueprints for the KONRIKO Company Store.

Five years ago, his dream was realized when the KONRIKO Company Store opened its doors for the first time. Since then, the mill and the store have become one of the top three tourist attractions in Iberia Parish.

The front of the store is an exact replica of an old country store where unique Louisiana products and KONRIKO brand products are sold. An employee also cooks a KONRIKO product daily for the tourists to sample.

In the back of the store is a small theatre which seats approximately 50 people. For a small fee you may see a slide presentation which shows the Exile and Plight of the Acadians, and our way of life in South Louisiana.

Then the tour-guide takes you on a trip through the mill, where she explains the milling process, and you may even get to see the employees preparing the rice for shipment.

So, if you want to learn about the Cajun Heritage or sample a KONRIKO product, the place to go is the KONRIKO Company Store. The small fee for the tour is definitely worth it!

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