Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival Association
Gearing Up For Acadian Style Celebration

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BREAUX BRIDGE — If the members of the Breaux Bridge Louisiana Crawfish Festival Association took the time out to throw themselves a party before the start of the biennial celebration, it would be understandable.

It takes a tremendous amount of preparation to get ready to entertain the crowd — an estimated 150,000 persons — expected to converge on this St. Martin Parish community April 30 and May 1.

On Thursday the Crawfish Festival Association did just that. Dr. and Mrs. Ernest Yongue hosted a get-together for association members so they could enjoy some of the things they may be too busy to take part in when the festival rolls into town — good food, good company, good drink, and, of course, crawfish races.

The crawfish has grown from practically no status to a status symbol. Ignored for many years, it now enjoys such popularity that visitors from all parts of the nation converge on Breaux Bridge to see and taste the area gastronomical delight.

Legend has it that the crawfish were originally lobsters in their native land of Nova Scotia. When the Acadians were exiled to Louisiana, the crawfish chose to follow the happy people. During the long and very difficult trip, the crawfish got smaller and smaller. By the time they reached their new home, the crawfish were only a few inches long.

Since that time the crawfish has firmly established itself in the lifestyle of the Acadian descendants. The area gained fame in the 1920s and 1930s as news of the tempting crawfish dishes served in local restaurants reached the rest of the world.

The festival officially got its start in 1959 when the late House Speaker Bob Angelle of Breaux Bridge persuaded other members of the Louisiana Legislature to declare Breaux Bridge La Capitale Mondiale de L'Ecrevisse. The town has fiercely defended its title as Crawfish Capital of the World from upstarts ever since.

Festival Association members claim the riotous weekend of food and merriment is the second largest tourist attraction in the state, second only to Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

This year the Crawfish Festival Association offers as tempting a weekend as ever has been prepared. And that's not idle promise, considering the fantastic attractions of past years:

• 1958 — The first year of the Crawfish Festival was actually a centennial celebration in recognition of 100 years of incorporation of the City of Breaux Bridge, Louisiana.

 Governor Earl K. Long was there, and so was an estimated crowd of 75,000 persons. It's said that cars were lined up from Breaux Bridge all the way to Lafayette when the centennial parade ended on Sunday.

• 1962 — During this year themes were introduced to the festival. For “The Spirit of the Confederacy,” the Festival Association declared Breaux Bridge to have seceded from the Union, and as a “foreign nation,” to be eligible for foreign aid in the form of rice, red and black pepper, and crawfish. A “crawfish net” was set up (in mockery of the Iron Curtain) to protect the celebrating Cajuns and visitors from invasion.

• 1964 — Said by some to be the most successful festival of all, the 1964 Crawfish Fest featured “Jambalaya: A Backward Glance in Louisiana History.” A flotilla of boats was paraded up the Bayou Teche, and Gov. Jimmie Davis’ white horse Sunshine, once ridden into the state capital, led the parade through town.

• 1965 — “Acadian Humor” was the theme of this year’s festival. In its honor, Gov. John McKeithen hosted a crawfish cookout on the lawn of the governor’s mansion in Baton Rouge. One ton of crawfish was consumed by state leaders, politicians, judges, sheriffs, and other public officials. A significant portion of that amount was eaten by a Breaux Bridge man, the late Andrew Thevenet. Thevenet devoured 33 pounds of crawfish in one sitting, establishing a record that has yet to be equaled or broken.

• 1969 — The 10th anniversary of the festival was marked by “Memories of Acadiana.” Past festivals were honored, and festival-goers celebrated twice as hard to dispute claims the town of Pierre Part made that it was the rightful Crawfish Capital of the World.

• 1974 — The “Crawfish Hoedown” was a colorful festival featuring hot air balloon races, spectacular fireworks displayed over the Bayou Teche, dancing, and parades. Former Wildlife and Fisheries Commission Secretary Burton Angelle, of Breaux Bridge, served as grand marshal.

This year’s festival will begin at 5 p.m., April 30, with a Mass at St. Bernard Catholic Church. Local bands featuring French and country-western music, a crawfish eating contest, and boiled crawfish on the festival grounds will continue until the early hours of the morning.

Saturday, April 1, activities will begin with a five-mile crawfish run and a one-mile fun run at 8:30 a.m. The festival grounds will officially open at 9 a.m. The crawfish peeling contest will be held at 10:45 a.m., and the street parade lines up at 11 a.m. The famous crawfish races begin at 1:45, with several heats scheduled. The crawfish-eating contest will be held at 7 p.m. Also, an arts and crafts show and sale will be going on all day in the Breaux Bridge Junior High gymnasium.

Boiled crawfish will be sold on the festival grounds all day, and there will be continuous entertainment.