Epicyureans Detail Ponce Culinary Joy

By HOWARD JACOBS

A LEARNED and revealing report on the meaning of "hog ponce," or "panse," comes via Opelousas Daily World editor John Thistlethwaite, and should set at rest the teapot tempest swirling about the word's gastronomical implications.

"'Ponce,'" said he, "has been quite inadequately reported as being only the stuffed stomach of a hog. Cajun and Creole cooks take a well-cleaned hog stomach and stuff it with a spicy mixture of browned ground pork, cooked rice and various seasoning vegetables and spices; a sort of 'dirty rice.' They sew the openings tightly and drop this ball in boiling water. The heat shrinks the stomach astonishingly, compressing the contents to the texture of tender roast beef. The 'ponce' is served sliced, hot or cold, and is a treat.

'Once I was among guests of a host who promised us 'ponce' for supper. We arrived to find him seated disconsolately at his kitchen table, slugging down bourbon and gazing woefully at a wizened wad on his chopping board.

'While he had been otherwise occupied, after he had cleaned the hog's stomach and made his 'dirty rice,' his wife decided to give the stomach a final cleaning and dipped it unstuffed into the boiling water. This shrunk his 'ponce' prematurely and wrecked our hosts' plans. All was not lost, however. We simply feasted on his tasty dirty rice and the remainder or the delectable fare, and had a merry evening.'

Another dissertation on the meaning of "panse" and "tasso" is provided by attorney Paul C. Tate of Eunice, who encloses a copy of his letter on the former to Matt Vernon, editor of the Eunice News.

"As regards the word 'tasso,'" "you must have misinterpreted Louis Vidrine's remarks, since 'tasso' cannot be the phonetic spelling for 'jerky.'" (Conductor's note: We never meant to say that it was, but undoubtedly gave that impression by writing that "tasso is the phonetic spelling for jerky.

We should have said more explicitly that "tasso" is the phonetic spelling for the word that means jerky).

The word 'tasso' might come from the French word "tasseeau," which literally means 'tassle' and may have some relation to the fact that tasso was sometimes sundried by hanging on a line or fence.

'Tasso,' as used in Louisiana, more probably comes from the Creole word 'tasso' or 'tasseeau' which is a popular prepared meat in Haiti. Turkey tasso is made like tasso is made in Louisiana, that is, the meat is marinated and then dried (usually on a tin sheet or roof) in Haiti. Although I am not aware that tasso, as we know it, is 'saccade' in Parisian French, tasso meat is 'saccade,' meaning cut by jerks, or jagged.

In his letter to editor Vernon, Tate discounts the misspelling of "ponce," and noted the correct "panse" properly translated as "paunch," defined as the first stomach of a ruminant. "Of course," said he, "these terms do not translate easily and the proper way to refer to 'panse' is to spell it in the French original as we do for 'boudin.'"