Creole-Acadian Cookery Lauded

A fusion of tantalizing aromas from the kitchen just now have set us to rapturous culinary thoughts—seafood gumbo, oyster pie, stuffed mirliton and French drip coffee. All of which spell out Louisiana Creole-Acadian cookery.

Louisiana, unlike Gaul, is divided into two parts, the North and the South. Anglo-Saxon North Louisiana is not at home with the brown roux, crawfish etouffee and gumbo. But in all sections where the Gallic influence has penetrated, one finds a richer cuisine, and Baton Rouge, first settled by the French, has retained some of this early kitchen savvy.

South Louisianians traditionally have always upheld the love of good fare. It was Mark Twain who, on a visit to New Orleans, wrote that the saltwater pompano was "as delicious as the less well known Louisiana food writer, in a recent book says that there is a saying in Carolina which goes like this: "Never call it hominy grits, or you will give Charlestonians fits." You'll give some South Louisianians fits, too, if you don't stick to just plain "grits."

There is a tendency in non-grits eaters newly moved to Louisiana to use grits as a plural word. Down here it's a collective noun and one says "The grits is good."

Looking back, if you lived in the country and the first frost was already on the pumpkin, then it was hog-killing time, which involved killing squeal of the pig and also have visions of the tasty fresh pork roasts, assorted sausages and cracklings (called grations in French). Although the traditional old dishes are not found in every South Louisiana home in the old days, some are still flourishing right here in Baton Rouge.

Gumbo still rules the roost on the fall and winter table in many homes. Incidentally, the word gumbo is a corruption of the Congolese word gombo which means okra. Slaves coming from that country affected the local cookery, and they included gumbo in their diet. Dover New Orleansians sometimes serve seafood in pies—using the shrimp, or crawfish or oyster. In the Acadiana River Basin, one finds a tempting dish—turtle pie.

The list of delectable vegetables runs the gamut, including the eggplant, squash and mirliton which are often stuffed. A peculiarity of the River Road section is to fry thinly sliced eggplant and sprinkle with sugar before bringing to the table.

Wild game sparks the Creole menu, as do a variety of fish dishes, including red fish court-bouillon. The South Louisiana Frenchman likes his homemade aperitifs, too, chief of which is cherry bounce, made from Bourbon whiskey, sugar and wild cherries. It's considered a nice "pick up" drink when friends drop by. By long custom Sunday dinner always used to be something special. But alas, times does not always work in favor of this delightful tradition. A friend once remarked sadly that her little boy would grow up and would never know what Sunday dinner meant.

And so it goes—the rapid pace of life today and the old adage that "slow cookery is good cookery" are in deep decline. Well, anyway, bon appetit to all.