In New Orleans, “gumbo” is a soup made with okra and seafood. In Southwest Louisiana, the stronghold of the Acadians, “gumbo” is also a soup, but not necessarily made with okra.

Gumbo is just about anything that starts with a roux — that mixture of fat and browned flour that is the basis for dozens of Acadian dishes. Gumbo is also the colloquial name for okra, but the two need not be combined to be the kind of gumbo one “eats with a spoon”.

Acadians of south Louisiana make gumbo with seafood, chickens and other domestic fowl, sausage, “tasso” (smoked beef) and what have you. — Gumbo is traditionally the “big company” dish — the one item on the menu that can be stretched by adding an extra cup or two of water — and still keep its delicious taste and piquante seasoning.

**Sauce Piquante**

What’s true of gumbo in Acadian land is also true of “sauce piquante,” that spicy mixture of tomato gravy, meats or seafood. Both gumbo and sauce piquante — can make a modest amount of basic ingredient go a long way; both are best served with hot rice.

Grocers in the bayou country hasten to stock lots of “onion tails” (green shallots) when the wind turns north — the first hint of winter weather turn every true Acadian’s thoughts to gumbo. On the other hand, sauce piquante is a year around dish, as acceptable in summer as in winter.

The authors of “Cajun Country Cookin’” spent 10 years roaming the byways and bayous of the Cajun country in Louisiana learning the fundamentals of this Cajun cuisine.

They are John and Glenna Uhler, Iberville Parish librarians and formerly of Lafayette, where Uhler was a staff writer for the Daily Advertiser. Their 400-plus recipes in the book were originated and developed from that knowledge gleaned from hundreds of South Louisiana families. They have also thrown in “Lagniappe”, which makes this a most unusual cookbook and one of the few that truly represents Cajun country cooking.

As writers and librarians, the Uhlers know the values and pleasures of a “reading type” cookbook, one that can be read with enjoyment even without the pangs of hunger.