Holiday Traditions
Over The Generations
By BOBBE WEST

A few weeks ago, Jack Froet talked with an elderly French lady somewhere in South Louisiana on Channel 2's "Acadiana Journal" about the tradition in her family of baking pies on Good Friday. I hadn't heard of the tradition before and wondered where it might have begun -- I didn't remember hearing any local French folks speak of pies in connection with Good Friday.

Mostly around here it seems like Good Friday is the time to gather for crawfish or a courtbouillon 'with fry on the side'.

The lady he interviewed said she didn't know how it started -- they had forgotten whether they were supposed to feast or fast but knew they were supposed to do something on Good Friday different from other days, so they started getting the family together to eat pies.

It seemed that they make fruit pies with all the different types that they know how to make and then the whole family gathers at her home (the grandmother) and eat pies and drink coffee on Good Friday morning.

Since many places of business close on Good Friday and most area farmers and gardeners don't dig in the soil on this day -- it would seem reasonable for her family to gather at the homeplace in the morning before going to the afternoon service at church.

Meat and the accompanying rice and gravy are out (or at least it was a generation and more ago in Catholic families) so it seems natural for some sort of dough preparation to be served to guests.

Maybe it just naturally evolved that they'd try to outdo each other with fancy pies for the occasion and one family's tradition was born.

Since these kinds of things always tickle my curiosity I dug in my cookbook collection for the one I inherited from my mother that was published in 1949 by the National Catholic Rural Life Conference to see if any reference may have been made of such a tradition in times past.

(Perhaps you have this book in your collection, too, it was called "Cooking from Christ", Your Kitchen Prayer Book, by Florence Berger.)

Among the explanations of Easter breads and cakes and how eggs came to be used -- as symbols of new life -- even in paging times -- and later used as liturgical symbols -- I found nothing about pies and Good Friday but did you know that the twist in French bread may have begun with the thought of symbolizing the rope that Judas used to hang himself after realizing what he had done? We often twist strips of dough to lay across the tops of fruit pies before baking and most of us thought that it just made it prettier, we didn't think we were doing it as a gesture passed down through generations as a reminder that perhaps we are Judases, too, in other ways.

The Easter cake has been changed so much over the years that it is much more usual to see it baked in the shapes of bunnies or chicks or something other than the traditional dark nut cake with nut icing in a wreath shape to symbolize the circle of death, with a single Christ candle for new life or the center filled with eggs that also symbolize life.

The idea of making cakes, breads, cookies and even pies, I guess, in the form of a circle at Easter is customary in many cultures. Some make it in braids and just big enough to hold one egg, some rolled like a sausage and made into a ring.

Perhaps this is one way the Easter nest began -- the circle of green grass with a center of bright eggs. The wreath or circle of life and the human soil on this day -- it would seem reasonable for her family to gather at the homeplace, to eat pies and drink coffee on Good Friday different from other days, so they started getting the family together to eat pies.

The 'pocking' of eggs that occurs at Easter is an effort to break the shell. The lady he interviewed said she had forgotten whether they were supposed to do something on Good Friday different from other days, so they started getting the family together to eat pies.

Now, as often as not, the simple act of 'pocking' has become a pastime for old men -- perhaps tricking each other with a fake egg or a hardselled guinea egg to accumulate all the eggs offered by others in an effort to break the shell.

The youngsters would rather accumulate candy eggs or long-eared stuffed bunnies to decorate their bed or anything other than another hard-boiled egg.

The meaning of colored eggs as a symbol of new life seems to be diminishing.

If the eating of pies draws a family together during the season, then this tradition is as valid as any other to mark the season.

Let's see now should I make apple pie with cinnamon and sour cream or lemon chiffon piled high with strawberry or fig or dewberry or pecan or??????