In the Land of Crawfish

By Winifred Green Cheney

In the tall pine country of northwest Louisiana is picturesque Natchitoches. This early French outpost, the first white settlement west of the Mississippi River, was founded in 1714 by Louis Juchereau de St. Denis. Amazingly the town has retained much of its colonial flavor with quaint brick streets winding along the high banks of Cane River Lek. Many of its early American homes are excellently preserved.

We spent the night in the traveler's room of historic Beau Fort. This plantation house, built about 1830 on the site of the first forts in the area, has a long line of magnificent oaks approaching its wide veranda. Our hostess for the evening, Mrs. C. Vernon Cloutier, served us her delightful mint juleps on the old brick patio. Later in a dining room that has been used for seven generations, we sampled some of the delectable cuisine for which its owner is noted. The shrimp soup, a meal in itself, was superb.

Natchitoches is the native home of an unusual culinary treat, a tasty meat pie. A meat filling is enclosed in rich pastry and fried in deep fat and served piping hot. At festival celebrations vendors peddle this delicacy on downtown street corners. The chatelet of the historic town houses and those of the plantations nearby were famous for their marvelous food, which features a blend of its Spanish and French heritage along with that added by the West Indian slaves who worked on the cotton plantations.

On leaving Natchitoches we headed southeast for the beguiling Bayou country driving through dense forests of cypress, oak, and willow. These overhang winding bayous where misty curtains of Spanish moss enfold every tree branch. As the soft sun rays shift, its color changes from silver gray to green.

A Bounty of Provisions

Lafayette is the gateway to the heart of the Bayou country— noted for its 25-mile Azalea Trail, which flowers in March with unbelievable brilliance. You will sample here the well-known crawfish, and sweeter. In March with unbelievable brilliance. You will sample here the well-known crawfish, and sweeter.

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Lafayette is the gateway to the heart of the Bayou country—one of the most famous Cajun country Just to enjoy its magnificent crawfish dishes. From the bisque to the etouffee to the fried crawfish, every bite was tastier than the first. It is worth a trip to the Cajun country just to enjoy its magnificent crawfish dishes.

SHRIMP SOUP SUPREME

1/2 pound (4 ounces) butter
1/2 cup finely chopped celery
2 medium shallots
3 1/2 cups canned cream of mushroom soup
1/2 cup finely chopped green onion tops
1 cup water
1/4 cup finely chopped parsley
1/2 cup sherry
1/4 teaspoon Tabasco
salt to taste

In a large saucepan or soup kettle saute the celery in butter over very low heat for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the shrimp, etouffee, and Tabasco, and salt to taste. Cook over medium heat for 20 to 25 minutes until it is thick and smooth. The soup is very filling and will freeze. The soup is good served as a First course or as a main course.

NATCHETOS MEAT PIES

2 pounds ground lean beef
1 pound ground pork
2 tablespoons shortening
5 green onions finely chopped
3 medium onions ground with juice
2 bell peppers finely chopped
2 tablespoons parsley finely chopped
1 garlic pod minced
2 tablespoons flour
2 tablespoons water, if needed
1/4 teaspoon paprika
red pepper, black pepper, and salt to taste

In heavy skillet cook the meat in shortening over medium heat, stirring often, until it is meatily brown and crumbles. Add the onions, bell peppers, parsley, garlic, and seasonings and cook 10 minutes more. Remove from heat and stir in the flour and water. Blend the ingredients together. Cool and then freeze in a freezer for 30 minutes.

PASTRY

4 cups plain flour
1 teaspoon salt
4 teaspoons baking powder
2 eggs
1 cup milk
1/2 cup shortening

Sift the dry ingredients into a large bowl. Beat the eggs and add to milk. Add to the dry ingredients gradually and knead until consistency to roll out. Roll as thin as possible, making the edges even. Put one tablespoon of the meat mixture on each pastry round. Fold over, making the edges even. Firm the edges with a fork. Fry in deep fat at 350 degrees until golden brown. Yield: 24 pies.