The young beauty, Junior Queen of the Crawfish Festival, won title almost as coveted as that of actual festival queen.

Cajun clothes and bonnets of the ladies bear emblem of festival, which is held every year at town of Breaux Bridge.

Crawfish races are a big event of day. Also featured are beard-growing contest, parade of floats, beauty contest.

The Crawfish Capital celebrates

The Acadians of southern Louisiana regard the crawfish as more than a food or a basic industry. He’s so popular, they hold a festival in his honor every year

To most people, the crawfish is a little lobster-like creature that scoots backwards along creek beds when disturbed, and has little value except as bait for young fishermen.

But to the French-speaking Acadians who inhabit the picturesque swamp country of southern Louisiana, the crawfish is a major industry, the symbol of a way of life.

The swamp crawfish often attains a length of six to eight inches from tail to claw-tip, and the meat of the tail is considered a delicacy, tastes much like lobster but sweeter and more tender. Served with rice, it makes a famous jambalaya; lumped into soup, it makes a fine gumbo or bisque; doused in hot sauce, smothered in rice and vegetables, and topped with a crust, it gives its name to crawfish pie.

Place of honor. It’s also the object of a festival (pictures), a kind of up-country Mardi Gras held every year at a town called Breaux Bridge, which the Louisiana legislature six years ago designated “The Crawfish Capital of the World.” Breaux Bridge lies at the western end of the Atchafalaya Swamp, the only area where crawfish are big enough and plentiful enough to be commercially marketable.

Last weekend, the town drew in three or four times its 3,300 population for the Crawfish Festival. Women in Cajun bonnets and men in bib overalls and turned-up Western hats danced to the jangle of fiddle, accordion, and guitar; teenagers swayed to the rasping of a saxophone atop a flat-bed truck.

Floats on the oak-verged Bayou Teche depicted the crawfish; costumes and banners carried his image; women competed in cooking him, men gathered to watch him race for prizes. The prettiest daughters of the most important people vied for the Evangeline country’s biggest honor, the title of Crawfish Queen.

Rising demand. Crawfish always have graced the dinner-tables in these parts. But a growing demand from people in other parts of the U.S., coupled with a shortage in supply resulting from the silting-up of the Atchafalaya River floodway, has brought into being more than 20 crawfish ranches.

Biggest of these is a 600-acre operation near Breaux Bridge owned by Don’s Seafood & Steak House, restaurateurs of Lafayette and Baton Rouge. Opened three years ago at a cost of $40,000, the ranch last year harvested 175,000 lb. of crawfish, or about $45,000 worth. For an idea of how expensive crawfish meat is, bear in mind that only about 15% of the creature’s total weight is edible.

Ashby Landry, one of the owners, says that the two restaurants grossed more than $1-million last year. And out-of-state demand was so great that Don’s sold 60,000 cans of frozen, ready-to-serve crawfish dishes. These were made up by hand in the restaurant kitchen.

Louisiana’s rice farmers, too, are getting into the crawfish business. They find they can rotate between rice—a summer crop—and crawfish—a winter crop. And the crawfish enjoy the irrigation ditches.
Cooking Bee, entered by amateur chefs.
Here judges taste entries, most of which, naturally, feature crawfish.

Symbol of the festival sails up Bayou Teche. Tasty little crustacean is gaining popularity in rest of U.S., too.

Big time at festival is evening, when the streets of Breaux Bridge are turned over to the fais-do-do, or dancing, with folk steps for oldtimers and twisting for teenagers. Town was named Crawfish Capital six years ago.

Country-style is the mood of the feast, though sophisticated thinking and a lot of money go to promote crawfish.