

## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### **A Big Hop Over the Ditch**

In an article in "The Louisiana Planter and Sugar Manufacturer, Vol. viv, No. 19", it was announced that in March of 1910 the Louisiana Meadows Company offered various awards to the farmers in the Raceland Prairie. Raceland, you may know, is located on Bayou Lafourche in Lafourche Parish, Louisiana. There were prizes for all sorts of things like the best ears of corn, biggest pumpkins and hogs. Philibert Guichet (1854-1933) was listed as second place winner for "the best kept ditch" (hardly an earth-shattering accomplishment), but nine years later his son (also named Philibert Guichet) would also come in second place. This time it was in a prestigious New York cocktail competition, and his creation "The Grasshopper" would become famous the world over.

Guillaume and Marie Abadie Tujague had left their native Bordeaux, France, in 1852 for a future in the Crescent City. Guillaume, a butcher by profession, had opened Tujague's Restaurant on Decatur Street across from the Old Butcher's area in the French Market. Shortly before he died in 1912, Guillaume sold his interest in the restaurant to Philibert Guichet and Jean-Dominic Castet. The young Philibert Guichet had come from Guichetville, a small community near Raceland (with a well kept ditch). Castet arrived in New Orleans from France in 1905. In 1914, Guichet and Castet purchased Madame Begué's restaurant from her then-widowed daughter (Mrs. Anouille) to create Tujague's in its current location on the corner of Decatur and Madison streets. Tujague's (founded 1856) is still operating today as New Orleans' second oldest continuously operating restaurant behind Antoine's (1840).

Guichet's "Grasshopper" (1919) is a mint-flavored after-dinner cocktail. Its "grasshopper green" color and sweet mint taste is provided by the dominant ingredient, *Crème de menthe*. The drink is rounded out by an equal amount of white *Crème de cacao*. Whipping

cream is added to the concoction (two ounces to one ounce each of the other two liqueurs). After being shaken well, the beautiful mixture is poured into chilled cocktail glasses (preferably martini glasses).

Numerous references to the famous cocktail have been made in movies and on television programs. There are even recipes for grasshopper pie. Most require Oreo cookie crumbs (fillings discarded), butter, milk, marshmallows (or eggs and gelatin), *Crème de menthe*, white *Crème de cacao*, whipping cream and perhaps a little green food dye.

Philibert Guichet has been gone from us a long time now since his big hop from Lafourche Parish to fame in "The Big Easy". Tujague's is now under the excellent proprietorship of Steven Latter and family, who purchased the landmark restaurant in 1982. The owners continue in the Tujague's tradition, serving multiple courses including Chicken *Bon Femme*, delicious Shrimp *Rémoulade*, the signature brisket and the house creation known as "cap" bread (named for the length of dough that's baked atop the French loaf). Dark coffee, still served in shot glasses, is a splendid accompaniment.

Clémence Castet, Jean-Dominic's widow, was a mainstay at Tujague's until her death in 1969, often bringing entrées to the guests herself. The Guichet family retained possession of Tujague's until its present ownership.

The Tujague's list of famous diners is vast. It includes: "Presidents – Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, France's De Gaulle", and its guest book carries the names of the following notables: "Cole Porter, O. Henry, Diane Sawyer, Don Johnson, Harrison Ford, Margot Kidder, Dan Akroyd, Ty Cobb, John D. Rockefeller" and other greats (but not in that order).

And from Tujague's famous bar in the French Quarter, a gorgeous green potable that gained its popularity in a second place finish just before the start of prohibition (and prominence as a mid-century favorite throughout the American South) continues to charm lounge lovers longing for a lively lift.

## **NED HÉMARD**

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