

## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### **Creole Mustard**

A century ago (1911), Oscar "Papa" Celestin, historic jazz trumpeter, founded New Orleans' Original Tuxedo Brass Band.

Also that year, the New Orleans Mint was formally decommissioned, a sad event in the hearts and minds of Louisianans.

Mardi Gras Day, February 28, 1911, was ruled by Rex, King of the Carnival, in the person of William Stauffer, who headed his 20-float parade in blazing sunshine. His route took five hours, and its theme that year was "The Arts and Sciences".

St. Denis J. Villere founded Villere & Co. in 1911. Managing over one billion dollars in assets, the family-run investment firm is still going strong today.

Iconic showman Louis Prima was born in New Orleans on December 07, 1911, and grew up in the Tremé neighborhood. He wowed us with hits like "Just a Gigolo", "Buona Sera" and "Old Black Magic".

Ragtime (and now Jazz with all its improvisation) was popular in New Orleans. Ragtime (short for "ragged time") was highly syncopated, danceable music that combined elements of the military marches of Sousa, European music with additional polyrhythms coming from African music. It began as dance music in the red light districts of New Orleans and St. Louis years before being published as popular sheet music (which was first done in 1895 by Ernest Hogan, a black performer from the Shake Rag district of Bowling Green, Kentucky). Scott Joplin found fame in 1899 with the "Maple Leaf Rag" and other popular Ragtime compositions. Irving Berlin had his first hit in 1911, "Alexander's Ragtime Band," and called Ragtime "the best heart-raiser and worry-banisher I know."

One popular and lively Ragtime two-step, *Très Moutarde* (Too Much Mustard) was composed in 1911 by Englishman Cecil Macklin. Bandleader James Reese Europe recognized the song's value and used

it in the dance routine performed by Irene and Vernon Castle. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers danced to the song in the movie tribute to the popular dancing duo.

Veteran New Orleans pianist H.J. Boiusseau recorded *Très Moutarde* in 1958, re-creating how local piano players performed the piece in 1911 (close to the original sheet music and only a bit syncopated).

By now, dear reader, you are saying "Too much mustard!" Alas, it is only the beginning.

Seven years before the events of 1911, St. Louis, Missouri, was hosting a fair. The use of mustard as a hot dog condiment was first seen at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, when French's mustard made its debut. Bright yellow by the inclusion of turmeric, this ever-popular variety is the most commonly used mustard in the United States and Canada. Outside North America it is called American mustard. It was created in 1904 by George T. French as "cream salad mustard" and goes hand-in-hand with hot dogs, cold cuts and hamburgers.

While all of this mustard history was being made, Zatarain's Creole Mustard had been on grocery shelves for several years. When Emile Zatarain started the company in 1889, he obtained his first product trademark and began to market root beer. Shortly after, he began to produce Creole mustard, stone ground with a uniquely vibrant flavor.

Rex Pure Foods and Horse Shoe Pure Products have been making Louisiana food products a long time, too (since 1888). They produce a variety of hot sauces, chow chow (pickle and mustard mixture), fish fry, cocktail onions, horseradish sauce, *répoulade* sauce, seafood boil and Creole mustard. Zatarain's and Horse Shoe are the leading Creole mustard purveyors in New Orleans.

Creole Mustard is found most often in the Southeastern United States, specifically Louisiana. A staple in New Orleans-style cuisine (with its blend of Spanish, French, African and German influences), this pungent prepared mustard owes its grainy appearance and distinctive tang to the spicy brown mustard seeds used in its preparation (rather than the somewhat blander, yellow seeds). The seeds are slightly crushed, neither ground nor are they whole. They are steeped in salt and distilled white vinegar, then coarsely ground and left to marinate for hours before packing. Great on po-boy sandwiches or in sauces, Creole mustard is also a major ingredient found in New Orleans' Creole-style *répoulade* sauce. Sometimes flavored with herbs, citrus fruits, peppercorns, honey, champagne or sherry, Creole mustard's flavor can range from mild to hot. And there is another variety of Creole mustard not coarsely ground, but completely smooth.

The English word "mustard" comes to us from the Middle English *moustarde*, a combination of the Old French words *moust* (must) and *ardens* (burning). *Moust* derives from the Latin *mustum*, meaning "new wine". Romans were probably the first to prepare mustard as a condiment. They mixed unfermented grape juice, known as "must", with ground mustard seeds (called *sinapis*) to make "burning must", *mustum ardens* — hence "must-ard". A recipe for a honey mustard glaze (for a spit-roasted boar) appears in a Roman cookbook from the late 4th or early 5th century.

In Matthew, Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven as a grain of mustard seed, "which a man took, and sowed in his field; which indeed is smaller than all seeds. But when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches." The plant referred to here is believed to be black mustard, *Brassica nigra*, a large annual plant up to 9 feet tall, but growing from a very small seed.

Mustard is a condiment made from the seeds of the white or yellow mustard plant, *Sinapis hirta*; brown or Indian mustard, *Brassica juncea*; or from black mustard. The whole, ground, cracked or bruised mustard seeds are mixed with vinegar or other liquids, and sometimes other flavorings, to create a thick paste ranging in color from bright yellow to dark brown. Mustard, due to mixing the ground seed with cold liquid allows an enzyme it contains to create isothiocyanates, responsible for mustard's characteristic heat.

There is also the mustard plant, known as "mustard greens" in the South. The "*Picayune Creole Cookbook*" (1901) states:

"Mustard is grown extensively in Louisiana, especially the large leaved or curled, which has grown to be a distinct Louisiana variety, quite different from the European. The seed is black, and is raised in Louisiana, and the plant is being more extensively cultivated every year. The large leaves are cooked the same as Spinach, or they may be boiled with salt meat and served as Greens."

The "*Picayune Creole Cookbook*" also lists "prepared mustard" as an ingredient for its version of *rémoulade* sauce. This is the English variety.

Jeremiah Colman popularized the use of mustard in England. He began making mustard at the Stoke Holy Cross water mill, near Norwich in the village of Bawburgh, and founded Colman's of Norwich in 1814. Experimenting to create a tangy flavor, Colman came up with a blend of brown mustard (*Brassica juncea*) and white mustard (*Sinapis alba*). From 1855 the firm introduced its distinctive yellow packaging and bull's head logo, and in 1866 was granted the Royal

Warrant as manufacturers of mustard to Queen Victoria. Her Majesty's household still uses Colman's today.

Also from the pages of history, renowned scientist Pythagoras used mustard paste to cure scorpion bites. Later mustard plasters were also extensively used to cure toothaches and other diseases. Christian missionaries used mustard in religious activities, and the Vatican even had an exclusive mustard-maker for the Pope.

*Rémoulade* (rā'mū-läd') is a sauce with numerous definitions. One says it is a mayonnaise sauce flavored with herbs, mustard and capers, served with salads, cold meat, etc. An 1817 recipe includes mustard and shallots. Another definition calls *rémoulade* a piquant cold sauce made with mayonnaise, chopped pickles, capers, anchovies and herbs. Madame Begué used mustard in preparing her anchovy salad, writing in her recipe, "*et de la moutarde au gout*" (and mustard to your taste). The French sauce named *rémoulade* derives its name from the Picard dialect *ramolas* or *rémola* for horseradish or black radish, originally from the Latin *armoracea*. So most *rémoulades* start with a little horseradish.

But New Orleans-style *rémoulade* is different from its French parent sauce. Each top-notch local restaurant has its own variation. Arnaud's even bottles theirs. In Louisiana Creole cooking, *rémoulade* often contains paprika and tends to appear more reddish to ruddy orange or pink, not yellowish as in other areas.

Quite piquant, Louisiana-style *rémoulades* fall into one of three categories—those with a mayonnaise base, those with a ketchup base and those with an oil base. All three have *beaucoup* vegetables (finely chopped) and usually green onions, celery and parsley. Most are made with Creole mustard along with salt, black pepper, and cayenne pepper to zip things up. In the oil or mayonnaise-based versions, the red-orange hue comes from paprika. Other additions include lemon juice, vinegar, minced garlic and horseradish. Creole *rémoulade* is nearly always associated with shrimp. Although Victor's Restaurant on Bourbon Street, 19th century predecessor to Galatoire's, offered a "Lamb's Brains a la Remoulade". According to his recipe, Monsieur Victor Bero used English mustard to make the *rémoulade* for this dish. Today, shrimp *rémoulade* is the ubiquitous chilled appetizer in New Orleans Creole restaurants' although, in some establishments, fried green tomatoes are added to the ensemble. And many enjoy the healthy choice of a Creole mustard vinegarette on one's salad.

Malcolm Gladwell in his latest book, "What the Dog Saw," tackles the question of why there are dozens of varieties of mustard but basically only one variety of ketchup. His story goes back to when French's yellow mustard in the plastic bottle dominated the American market. In the early 1970s, Grey Poupon was no more than a hundred-

thousand-dollar-a-year business. But they found through taste tests that people were willing to switch, something in the world of food that seldom happens. They dolled up the packaging, ran great ads (remember the Rolls-Royces pulling alongside each other and the "Pardon me. Would you have any Grey Poupon?") and the rest is history.

Where did the French mustard come from? Well, the Romans likely exported mustard seed to Gaul where, by the 10th century, monks of St. Germain des Pres in Paris absorbed the Roman art of mustard production. Mustard-makers appeared on the Paris royal registers back in 1292. Dijon, France, became a recognized center for mustard making by the 13th century and continues to this day. In 1777, one of the most famous Dijon mustard-makers, Grey Poupon was established as a partnership between Maurice Grey, who developed a unique mustard recipe containing white wine, and Auguste Poupon, his financial backer.

And don't forget German mustards, most of which are coarsely ground, sweet and mild, although there are some smooth ones. Brown mustard seed is preferred, though black is also used. German mustards are often flavored with herbs, and the milder mustards tend to be yellowish or light brown. Pale mild mustard is *Weisswurstsenf*, and hot mustard is described as *Scharfer Senf*.

So why the numerous varieties of mustard and only one basic ketchup? It seems ketchup, especially the Heinz brand, perfectly balances the five known fundamental tastes in the human palate. Mustard leaves more room for variation, so there never is "Too much mustard!"

## **NED HÉMARD**

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