

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

A Big Hop Over the Ditch

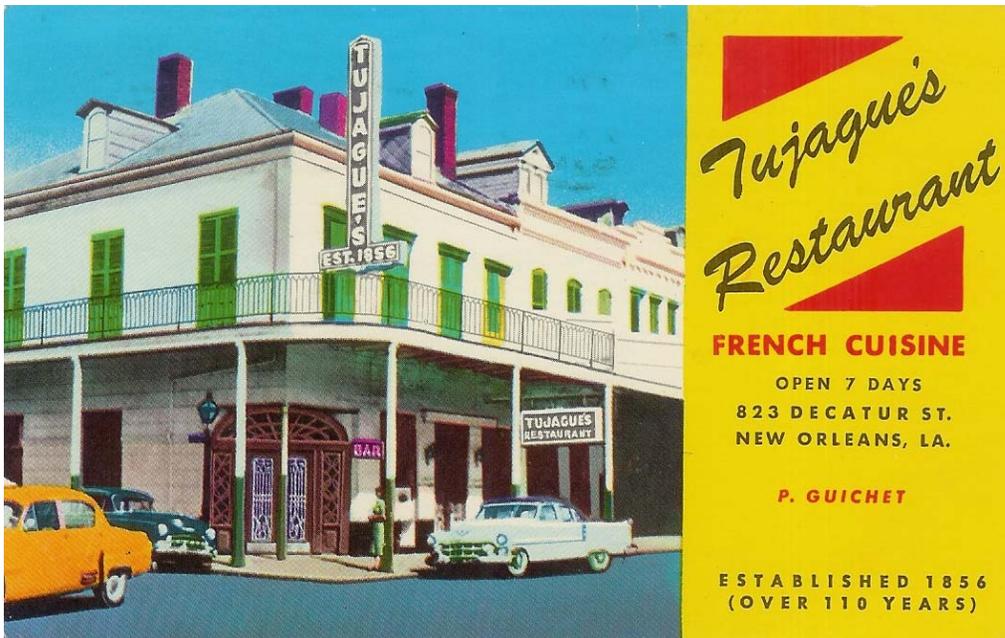
In an article in *The Louisiana Planter and Sugar Manufacturer, Vol. viv, No. 19*, it was announced that in March of 1910 the Louisiana Meadows Company offered various awards to the farmers in the Raceland Prairie. Raceland, you may know, is located on Bayou Lafourche in Lafourche Parish, Louisiana. 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 eighteen years later his son (Philip John Guichet) would also come in second place. This time it was in a prestigious New York cocktail competition in 1928, and his creation "The Grasshopper" would become famous the world over.



The Grasshopper

Philip John Guichet was the renowned mixologist-owner of Tujague's in New Orleans who served Teddy Roosevelt before he ascended to the Presidency. He also poured bourbon for Harry Truman and made Sazeracs for Eisenhower. In addition to his father, Philip had a brother named Philibert Guichet, and the two brothers were often confused through the years. Upon Philip's death in 1975, it was reported in the Baton Rouge *Advocate* that he "became associated with Tujague's in 1910," and is also "credited with creating the mixed drink called the 'Grasshopper'". The *Times-Picayune* bestowed Philip John Guichet the honor of "winning" the New York contest in "1928-1930" for "cocktail mixing with his 'Grasshopper' creation." The 1975 article also reported, "Guichet was co-owner of the 118-year-old restaurant at 823 Decatur St. for 42 years and sole owner for the past 13 years."

Despite these facts, "Philibert Guichet, Jr." has been credited in numerous sources as the creator of the "Grasshopper" cocktail. How Philip John Guichet came to mix the "Grasshopper" and own the historic Tujague's is an interesting story.



The tale begins with Guillaume Tujague who had left his native France, in 1852 for a future in the Crescent City. Guillaume, a butcher by profession, had opened Tujague's Café and Restaurant on Decatur Street across from the Old Butcher's area in the French Market. He was married to the former Marie Abadie. Eventually ownership in the restaurant was transferred to Philip Guichet and Jean-Dominic Castet. The young Philip Guichet had come from Guichetville, a small community near Raceland (with a well kept ditch). Castet arrived in New Orleans from France in 1905. Originally, Tujague's was not located at its current location at 823 Decatur Street on the corner of Madison Street. Begué's Exchange had once occupied this space,

home to the highly acclaimed cook, Madame Begué. She died in 1906. Tujague's (founded 1856) acquired the key corner location and is still operating there today as New Orleans' second oldest continuously operating restaurant behind Antoine's (1840).



Tujague's, in 1914 New Orleans Item ad, then located at 831 Decatur.

Étienne Anouilh, Guillaume Tujague's son-in-law, was Proprietor.

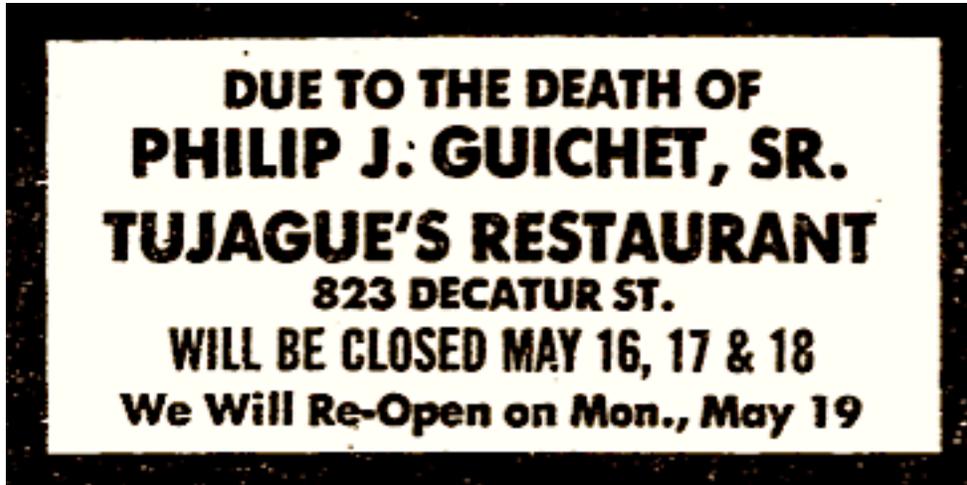
1906 saw the arrival of the Hemlock telephone exchange.

Guichet's "Grasshopper" (circa 1928) 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.

Philip 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 Mark Latter, whose father and

uncle purchased the landmark restaurant from the Guichet heirs in 1982. The Tujague's tradition continues, 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.



*Tujague's at 823 Decatur
closed for Philip J. Guichet's death in 1975*

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 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 (or maybe it was first) during prohibition (and prominence as a mid-century favorite throughout the American South) continues to charm lounge lovers longing for a lively lift.

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
"A Big Hop Over the Ditch"
Ned Hémard
Copyright 2009 and 2015