

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

“A Perfect Hubbub and Jubilee”

New Orleans has the distinction of being home to the oldest family-run restaurant in the United States, established in 1840 by Antoine Alciatore. Antoine's has created countless signature dishes, such as Oysters Foch and Rockefeller, *Pompano en Papillote*, *Pigeonneaux Royaux Sauce Paradis* and Eggs Sardou. Many diners love to complete their entrée with a fabulous dessert, often the football-size (and football-shaped) Baked Alaska or *Les Cerises Jubilé* (Cherries Jubilee).

Very popular at Antoine's, the Cherries Jubilee recipe gets its name because renowned chef Georges Auguste Escoffier, who headed the kitchen at London's Savoy Hotel in the late 1800s, created it for the “Golden Jubilee” (50th-anniversary celebration) of the reign of Queen Victoria in 1887. The beloved monarch was especially fond of cherries, so Escoffier elaborated on a long-established European tradition of preserving *les cerises* with brandy and sugar, instead simmering the fresh cherries in syrup and then thickening with arrowroot. The intoxicated cherries received a final flourish with a splash of liquor, showily ignited tableside. Escoffier immortalized his *Cerises Jubilé* in *Le Guide Culinaire*, published in 1903. Ice cream came some time later, which the flaming cherries were ladled over with great fanfare. The tradition continues at Antoine's.

A jubilee is a time to “raise a shout of joy” (from the Latin *iūbilāre*, via the Greek *iōbēlaios*, from the Hebrew *yōbēl* for the ram's horn that was blown as a sign of exultation). We learn in Leviticus of the first jubilee, a year of rest to be observed by the Israelites every 50th year, during which slaves were freed, alienated property was restored to the former owners and agricultural lands were left untilled. In the Roman Catholic Church, the name jubilee was applied to a holy year when a special privilege (plenary indulgence) was bestowed for a pilgrimage to Rome. The first was celebrated in 1300. The pope proclaimed in 1343 that holy years would come at 50-year intervals, reduced in 1470 to 25 years. There were papal ordination jubilees and reigning monarch

jubilees (as was the case with Queen Victoria). All were a time for great jubilation.

In Mobile Bay, there is the remarkable Alabama Jubilee (celebrated in song, of course, by Jewish songsmith Jack Yellen, who wrote the lyrics to more than 200 popular songs of the early 20th century, including "Ain't She Sweet", "Happy Days Are Here Again" and "Are You From Dixie?"). This is a jubilee of abundance (usually spotted on warm summer nights, August mostly, or in the early pre-dawn hours), where people living near the Bay will often ring bells and alert their neighbors so that everyone can hurry down to the shore with washtubs, gigs and nets, and gather an easy bounty of shrimp, crabs, flounder and other bottom feeders. This is made so effortless by some strange oxygen deprivation that takes place there, and the celebration (with lights shining into the Bay water) becomes a festive beach party. Jubilees are most common on the upper eastern shore of the Bay, from Point Clear to slightly north of Daphne, but they also occur south of Point Clear, and on the Bay's western shore.

But two years before Antoine's was founded, another kind of jubilee took place in the streets of New Orleans. The year was 1838.

The New Basin Canal, dug by Irish immigrant labor for the New Orleans Canal and Banking Company, was opened for traffic that year (after thousands of these workers succumbed to cholera and yellow fever). Financially the canal was successful, as it opened up trade with Lake Pontchartrain's north shore communities and the cities of Biloxi, Mobile and Pensacola on the Gulf of Mexico. The red-roofed New Canal Lighthouse (knocked out before and so severely damaged in Hurricane Katrina) was first constructed in 1838 (and completed the following February) at the entrance to the New Basin Canal.

Business was booming in the Crescent City, which was selling quite a bit to newly independent Texas. In 1838 virtually every item that a young and rapidly growing country needed, not to mention luxury goods, were provided by the scores of New Orleans merchants engaged in the Texas trade. Beautiful homes popped up that year, such as the Toby-Westfeldt House on Prytrania in the Garden District and the Miltenberger House in the 900 block of Royal (home to future Princess of Monaco, Alice Heine).

The 1838 Gibson's Guide and Directory of New Orleans published an image of the Orleans Theatre (now part of the Bourbon Orleans Hotel). The U.S. Mint in New Orleans began operation in March of 1838 with the production of silver dimes. And on Ash Wednesday, February 28, 1838, the New Orleans *Commercial Bulletin* printed an account of the city's first out-of-doors Mardi Gras celebration in the form of a parade, long before an organized krewe was established in 1857 (Comus). "The procession raised a perfect hubbub and jubilee," the 1838 article recounted, and wherever it went, the "exhibition surpassed anything of

the kind ever before witnessed here." The news account proclaimed:

"END OF THE CARNIVAL – The European custom of celebrating the last day of Carnival by a procession of masqued figures through the public streets was introduced here yesterday, very much to the amusement of our citizens. The principle streets were traversed by a masquerade company on horseback and in carriages, comprising every variety of costume and character, from the fantastic Harlequin to the sombre (sic) Turk and wild Indian. A delighted throng followed on the heels of the cavalcade as it marched through our city and suburbs."

And quite a hubbub it was. Hubbub, which traces its origin to a Celtic war cry, was first recorded in 1555 as an expression that meant "the confused shouting of a crowd." The Celtic source is probably related to *ub ub ubub*, a Scots Gaelic interjection expressing aversion or contempt, or to *abu*, an ancient Irish victory cry during battle. The chaotic din of "confused shouting" certainly takes place during both carnage and Carnival.

By the way, there is some "hubbub" involved in the preparation of *Pigeonneaux Paradis* (squabs in Paradise Sauce). This was the brainchild of Antoine's Roy Alciatore (1902-1972), and the sauce includes bacon, green onion and celery (cut in *julienne* strips), currant jelly and grapes in a chicken *Velouté* sauce (rich with butter).

The Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II was held in 2002 marking the 50th anniversary of the accession of Elizabeth to the throne, upon the death of her father, King George VI, on February 6, 1952.

Two years later, another "hubbub" occurred in the 2004 Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals case *Positive Black Talk, Inc. v. Cash Money Records, Inc.* New Orleans hip-hop artist DJ Jubilee, real name Jerome Temple, recorded a song in 1998 called "Back That A\$\$ Up" which was followed up by a huge hit for Juvenile on Cash Money Records called "Back That Thang Up" (explicit version titled "Back That Azz Up"). Though there are similarities and both songs repeat "the same hook", the jury concluded that Juvenile's recording was sufficiently different and did not infringe DJ Jubilee's copyright. DJ Jubilee is the current face of a musical movement in New Orleans called Bounce. It involves shouting call and response chants for the audience with DJ Jubilee creating dances to match those chants. Meanwhile, "Back That Azz Up" was one of the hits that launched Cash Money into the pop mainstream.

Tulane fans are probably curious about the origin of hullabaloo, the name of its weekly student-run newspaper as well as its school cheer. The newspaper started off in 1905 as the *The Tulane Weekly* and changed its name to *The Hullabaloo* in 1920. While no one actually recalls when the first English speaker pronounced hullabaloo, Tobias Smollett used it in a 1762 quotation. It probably has a linguistic

connection to hubbub, but no one knows for certain. After all, *hub-boo-boo* (or *hub-boo-loo*) is almost indistinguishable from *hubbub*. As is hullabaloo's meaning, "a great noise or excitement; an uproar".

Still there is no more "perfect hubbub and jubilee" as Mardi Gras in New Orleans, or maybe every 50 years or so when the Green Wave rises up to defeat LSU. That is, unless you're a Tiger fan.

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