

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémond

Good to the Last Drip

1967 was a time of change in the country with the film "The Graduate" providing a defining commentary of the age. Mrs. Robinson seduced Benjamin Braddock, "plastics" was the wave of the future and Simon and Garfunkel sang:

"Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?
A nation turns its lonely eyes to you
(Woo woo woo)
What's that you say, Mrs. Robinson
'Joltin Joe' has left and gone away?
(Hey hey hey - hey hey hey)"

But in 1973, Joe jolted back into public life with a brand new "plastics" product. Vincent Marotta, the man who created the automatic drip coffee maker known as "Mr. Coffee", had also coaxed the "Yankee Clipper" out of retirement and into the role of company spokesman.

The times they were a-changin' and they presented somewhat of a dilemma for this author. He was in search of some pot (no, not that kind of pot). It was a gift for someone who loved coffee, but prepared the old-fashioned New Orleans way. Thanks to Mr. DiMaggio, the presence of "Mr. Coffee" was ubiquitous - but not so the classic French drip coffee pot of bygone years. Where was one to find that white enameled French style graniteware drip pot?

Some may recollect the coffee pot's two-tiered design. The lower section (with handle and spout) was tall but wide at the bottom. A separate cylindrical upper container had a perforated top disk and bottom. Boiling water was poured through the top disk and dispersed over the ground coffee. It then dripped slowly into the lower serving chamber, producing a strong flavorful brew. A little "*au lait*" and "Ole!", one had a masterpiece. But all of this magic was not possible without the pot.

The year was 1975 and the solution was apparent. It was off to Ralph "Shultz's Fresh Hardware" on Lake Avenue, once the site of the old Bucktown Schoolhouse. Fortunately there were a few things in the store that were not all that fresh, for Schultz's had a couple of the desired coffee pots (imported from Belgium) collecting a bit of dust on the shelf. The gift search for a little Creole culture was a success.

The late Buddy DiLiberto would often proclaim "If you ain't in Bucktown, you ain't at the real Deanie's!" Schultz's store used to be right across the street from this famous seafood emporium, but as Benny Grunch laments in his song: "Schultz's 'Ain't dere no more". Nor are the boathouses built out into the 17th Street Canal. The look and feel of Bucktown has changed over time, but the memories linger on.

Harry Clann (1912-1985) had one of those boathouses where he built fine handcrafted wood pleasure boats for sports fisherman. He learned his trade early on and had worked for Andrew Jackson Higgins building landing craft and PT boats during World War II. Bucktown had started out this way over 150 years ago as a small village of fishing and hunting camps on stilts. Many residents were simply squatters who earned their livelihood from fishing, hunting, crabbing and trapping (with some entertainment on the side). Margie Vicknair-Pray remembered her dairyman grandfather, Sidney Lapuyade, hunting deer in the old days all the way to the present location of Lakeside Shopping Center. Her uncle was a rough-and-tumble fisherman with a Lafitte Skiff known as the "King of Bucktown". And there were Indian mounds, arrowheads and pottery shards around the area now known as Indian Beach.

So how did Bucktown get its name? There are all too many choices and the truth is lost in the mists of time and the aroma of crab boil. Take your pick: The bucks were either the deer hunted in the area or the "young bucks" out for a good time with another kind of "deer". What they probably got most likely was a good fight. Then there's the more elaborate tale of a local man named Oliver "Buck" Wooley who

shot a large buck and hung the antlers on the bridge crossing the canal. Folks who came to his boat rental business began calling the area "Buck's Town". An even more far-fetched explanation has "Buck" Wooley carving a "W" on the buttocks of a man who dared to dance with a coquette he was courting. He is said to have defiantly staked possession of "Buck's girl" in "Buck's town".

In the early part of the twentieth century the landscape was one of gambling establishments, saloons, dance halls and Jazz. Mugsy Spanier and the Bucktown Five would have played "Someday Sweetheart", or Johnny Wiggs the "Bucktown Bounce". Jelly Roll Morton performed his own "Bucktown Blues". This musical tradition lives on into the present with the fabulous "Bucktown All-Stars".

Today there are popular eateries along Old Hammond Highway such as R & O's (Roland and Ora Mollere) and II Tony's (*della famiglia Montalbano - "tal padre, tal figlio"*) along with luxury apartments with lake views and breezes. Many still miss Sid-Mar's on Orpheum (a popular seafood restaurant destroyed by Katrina), but there are great seafood markets on Lake Avenue such as Captain Sid's. Those white rubber shrimp boots are even affectionately called "Bucktown Topsiders". So although there's no more "fresh hardware" like Belgian coffee pots, there's still plenty of fresh seafood in this corner of Jefferson Parish that has so often "bucked" the established norms.

NED HÉMARD

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